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T. S. DENISON & COMPANY

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School Ma'am, 4 acts, 1¼ hrs.	6	5
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FARCES, COMEDIETTAS, Etc.

April Fools, 30 min.....	3	
Assessor, The, 10 min.....	3	2
Aunt Matilda's Birthday Party, 35 min.....	11	19
Baby Show, at Pineville, 20 min.....	19	
Bad Job, 30 min.....	3	2
Betsy Baker, 45 min.....	2	2
Billy's Chorus Girl, 25 min.....	2	3
Billy's Mishap, 20 min.....	2	3
Borrowed Luncheon, 20 min.....	5	
Borrowing Trouble, 20 min.....	3	5
Box and Cox, 35 min.....	2	1
Cabman No. 93, 40 min.....	2	2
Case Against Casey, 40 min.....	23	
Convention of Papas, 25 min.....	7	
Country Justice, 15 min.....	8	
Cow that Kicked Chicago, 20 m. 3	2	

T. S. DENISON & COMPANY, Publishers, 163 Randolph St., Chicago.

IN PLUM VALLEY

A RURAL COMEDY DRAMA
IN FOUR ACTS

BY
CHARLES ULRICH

AUTHOR OF

*"The Altar of Riches," "A Daughter of the Desert," "The High
School Freshman," "The Deserter," "The Hebrew," "The
Honor of a Cowboy," "The Man from Nevada,"
"On The Little Big Horn," "The
Town Marshal," "The Tramp
and the Actress," Etc.*



CHICAGO
T. S. DENISON & COMPANY, PUBLISHERS
163 RANDOLPH STREET

IN PLUM VALLEY

CHARACTERS.

UNCLE JARED WILKINS.....*A Down-East Farmer*
DR. ARTHUR MARKHAM.....*A Young Physician*
HUGH ELKINS.....*An Adventurer*
BILL STOUTER.....*Who Can't Stand High Altitudes*
CHARLIE SCOTT.....*A Plum Valley Rustic*
TED SIMPKINS.....*A Village Constable*
HAZEL ELKINS.....*Daughter of Uncle Jared*
AUNT LUCINDA WILKINS.....*Wife of Uncle Jared*
SALLIE BROWN.....*A Romantic Farm Maid*
GRACE STOLLARD.....*A Woman with a Past*
BOYS, GIRLS, COUNTRY PEOPLE.

SCENE—*New Hampshire.*

TIME—*The Present, August and September.*

TIME OF PLAYING—*Two Hours and Fifteen Minutes.*

ACT I—Uncle Jared's Farm.....*The Accusation*
ACT II—Aunt Lucinda's Sitting Room.....*The Arrest*
ACT III—The Glen in Plum Valley.....*The Attack*
ACT IV—Same as Act I.....*The Justification*

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SYNOPSIS FOR PROGRAM.

ACT I—Scott declares his love for Sallie. "I'm going to marry a Count." Elkins discloses his plans to Stouter. Jared and the calf. An awful cuss word. Hazel spurns Elkins. The supper. The accusation. The blow. "You're true blue, by gravy!"

ACT II—Lucinda and Sallie discuss matters. Jared tells the news. Elkins plays his trump card. Scott overhears conversation. The advertisement incriminating Markham. Hazel confesses to her father. Markham tells his story. The arrest.

ACT III—Grace and Stouter exchange confidences. Stouter is affected by the high altitude. The picnic. The jollification. Markham's innocence established. Grace meets Elkins. A cowardly blow. The accusation. Jared's answer to Elkins. "Go plumb to Jericho!"

ACT IV—The letter. Grace acquitted. Jared's offer to Grace. Her story of Elkins' perfidy. Jared defies dyspepsia. Elkins steals Hazel's jewels. His capture. Stouter on the water wagon. Course of true love runs smoothly.

THE STORY OF THE PLAY.

Hazel Wilkins, daughter of Uncle Jared, a New Hampshire farmer, meets and loves Dr. Arthur Markham, a physician. By means of a letter addressed to Hazel informing her that she is heir to \$60,000 bequeathed to her by a deceased uncle in South America, which is stolen by Hugh Elkins, a gambler, before it reaches her hands, the latter plots to marry her.

Hazel spurns his suit, and, to win the support of Uncle Jared, he prepares a fraudulent document purporting to be proof of fatal flaws in the title to Uncle Jared's farm. In order, also, to blacken Markham's character, Elkins causes to be published an advertisement offering a reward of \$1,000 for the arrest of Markham on a charge of forgery. Markham explains that his cousin of the same name had been

wrongfully accused of such a crime by a jealous rival and that he himself was innocent. Elkins, however, causes Markham to be arrested in revenge for being knocked down by the latter for insulting him.

Markham's innocence is established and he is released on the following day. At a picnic Grace Stollard, who is in fact the deserted wife of Elkins, appears. Elkins, dumb-founded at sight of her, resolves to kill two birds with one stone, by attempting to slay Markham and accuse Grace of the crime. He presumably kills Markham with a black-jack and causes Grace to be arrested as Markham's assailant, charging that her motive was revenge because of Markham's betrayal of her.

By the aid of Bill Stouter, who is acquainted with Elkins' record as bad man in the West, Grace is acquitted and Elkins charged with the crime. Markham meanwhile has recovered and Elkins returns to the farm for the purpose of stealing Hazel's jewels before quitting the country. He is captured with his booty and the cloud resting upon the courtship of Markham and Hazel being removed, all ends happily.

CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES.

JARED—A typical country farmer, jovial and good humored. He is about sixty years old, gray but youthful in manners. He should be played quietly to be effective. Ordinary country dress should be utilized.

MARKHAM—Young, handsome, lively and gay. He wears natty walking suit, Fedora hat and gloves and is stylish at all times.

ELKINS—Suave man of thirty years, smooth shaven and well groomed, with a tendency to be over-dressed. He must appear cool and calculating at all times, quiet and deliberate. His costume should be of that character to suggest the gambler and man of the world.

SCOTT—A country boy, lively and gay. He is about eighteen. He wears regulation farmer's boy costume.

STOUTER—An elderly man, gray, addicted to drink. He is quiet and humorous. He wears seedy clothing, but should be shabby genteel, with tall hat, flowing tie, etc.

SIMPKINS—A village town marshal, about sixty, gray hair and mustache. Gray suit, top boots, black flowing tie and blue shirt.

HAZEL—Handsome girl of twenty or thereabouts, emotional and gay by turns. She wears white shirt waist, blue skirt and sailor hat. Change for each act may be had if desired, though this is unnecessary.

LUCINDA—A woman of sixty, good-natured and matronly. She should be strongly characterized and may be portrayed after the spinster pattern. She wears ordinary house gowns.

SALLIE—A country girl of seventeen, lively and animated. She wears a calico dress of gaudy pattern throughout the play. Costume may be somewhat eccentric, though not pronouncedly so.

GRACE—A woman of thirty, sedate and emotional. She wears an ordinary summer costume with straw hat, gloves, etc.

PROPERTY LIST.

ACT I—Three or four rustic chairs, table, bench, basin, bucket, dipper, towel rack with towel, canvas-top wagon (optional), dishes, coffee pot, pitchfork. Letter for Elkins. Letter for Markham.

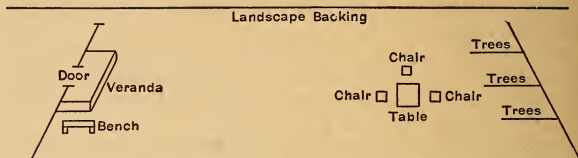
ACT II—Table with three or four chairs, easy chair, screen, sideboard, towel rack, lamp, book and papers for table. Sealed document for Elkins. Newspaper for Elkins. Rugs on floor, cheap chromos on wall, washstand.

ACT III—Bench, leaves and shrubbery. Documents for Elkins. Blackjack for Elkins. Basket with edibles of various kinds for Sallie and Scott.

ACT IV—Same props as in Act I, minus the dishes. Jewel case for Elkins. Letter for Sallie. Revolver for Simpkins.

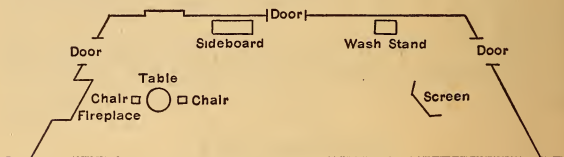
STAGE SETTINGS.

ACTS I and IV.

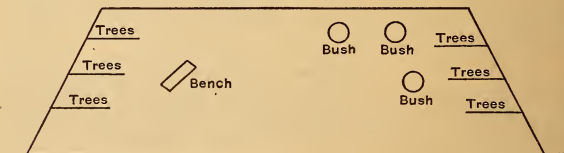


If set house cannot be placed in position, lines in the play may be changed here and there to convey idea that house stands off stage *R.*

ACT II.



ACT III.



STAGE DIRECTIONS.

R. means right of stage; *C.*, center; *R. C.*, right center; *L.*, left; *R. D.*, right door; *L. D.*, left door, etc.; 1 *E.*, first entrance; *U. E.*, upper entrance, etc.; *D. F.*, door in flat, or scene running across the back of the stage; 1 *G.*, first groove, etc. The actor is supposed to be facing the audience.

IN PLUM VALLEY

ACT I.

SCENE: *Farm yard of UNCLE JARED WILKINS, full stage. House with veranda reached by two steps, runs obliquely across R. Practical door in front of house and C. of veranda, upon which are three or four rocking chairs of rustic pattern. Bench about five feet long stands at lower end of veranda, with a bucket of water and dipper. Towel rack with towel is fastened to house near bench. If set house cannot be placed in position, lines may be changed here and there to convey idea that house stands off stage R. Pump may be placed up C. if desired, to add realism to scene. Also end of wagon with canvas top may be placed at L. 2 E., although this is not absolutely essential. Square table stands L. C., with rough kitchen chair at either side of it. Landscape backing, showing farm scene. Stage should be dressed so as to make scene typical, set trees being at both sides of stage. Dishes, coffee pot, etc., are on table. See Scene Plot for stage setting.*

At rise, discovered SALLIE at table arranging dishes and SCOTT washing his hands in basin at bench. Stage is well illuminated, it being afternoon.

SCOTT (*as he washes, to SALLIE*). Gettin' supper ready, Sallie?

SALLIE. No. I'm getting ready to scalp you unless you get a move on and milk the cows.

SCOTT (*comes C.*). Geewhiz! I'm sick of milking cows. I just finished plowin' that field down by the creek and I'm dead tired. (*Sits R. at table.*)

SALLIE (*laughing*). The trouble with you, Charlie, is, that you ain't in love with work.

SCOTT. Well, I don't hanker after work, Sallie. Besides, I can't love it and you, too, without making a muddle of one or the other.

SALLIE (*laughingly*). You love me! Why, you've got wheels in your head and they are all whizzing.

SCOTT. That may be, Sallie, but you start 'em goin' every time I see you.

SALLIE (*working savagely*). You'd better take them off your trolley, Charlie, if you know what's best for you. I'm not going to marry a New Hampshire farmer; not me!

SCOTT (*rises, surprised*). You don't intend to marry a city chap, one of them store dandies, do you?

SALLIE. Nope. I'm going to marry a Count.

SCOTT (*disgusted*). A no account, you mean.

SALLIE. That's better than a farmer, anyhow.

SCOTT. There are many who won't agree with you, Sallie.

SALLIE. By the way, did you go to the minister's pound party at Berkeley last night?

SCOTT. You bet I did.

SALLIE. What did they give him?

SCOTT. Mostly eggs.

SALLIE. Oh, they were all lay members at the party, eh?

SCOTT. I don't know about that, but everybody laid low until after supper, and then they flew the coop.

SALLIE (*laughingly*). I got a new coat from Aunt Lucinda today.

SCOTT. Is that so? How do you like it?

SALLIE. Oh, I'm just wrapped up in it!

LUCINDA (*offstage at door of house R.*). Sallie!

SALLIE. Aunt Lucinda! What can she want now?

LUCINDA (*offstage R.*). Sallie!

SALLIE. I'm coming, Aunt Lucinda. (*Goes R. to wardrobe.*)

SCOTT (*following her*). You heard about Dr. Markham, didn't you?

SALLIE (*pausing at veranda, surprised*). What about Dr. Markham?

SCOTT. He's going to spend a week on the farm and will be here tonight.

SALLIE. Oh, he's coming to visit Hazel. They're sweet on each other.

SCOTT. Why shouldn't they be? Dr. Markham is a fine chap who is worthy the best gal in Plum Valley—even Hazel Wilkins.

SALLIE (*after a pause*). What will Hugh Elkins say to this when he hears of it?

SCOTT (*disgusted*). Hang Elkins!

SALLIE. He dotes on Hazel, but she hates him like poison.

SCOTT. She ought to for Elkins's a skunk!

LUCINDA (*offstage R.*). Sallie!

SALLIE. I'm coming! (*To SCOTT.*) Don't forget to milk the cows, Charlie. (*Exit into house R.*)

SCOTT (*going to R. U. E.*). I wonder if Elkins is really setting his cap for Hazel? If I thought so, I'd warn her against him, for if what I've heard Stouter said about him is true then he'd disgrace old Nick himself. If I don't milk those cows now, Sallie'll give me no rest. (*Exit R. U. E.*)

Enter ELKINS and STOUTER L. U. E. ELKINS comes down C., looking about as if wishing to avoid everybody. STOUTER ambles down C. and sits L. at table.

ELKINS (*as he looks off into house R.*). No one about to interfere with us. (*Turns to STOUTER at table L. C.—to STOUTER.*) We may talk with freedom, Stouter. You will stand by me?

STOUTER. That depends, Elkins.

ELKINS. If I win this game I'm playing, you will share in the reward. Do you understand?

STOUTER. Perhaps. Is it that I am to be paid a certain sum of money provided I keep mum as to your past life?

ELKINS (*slapping STOUTER on shoulder, jovially*). That is it, my friend! (*Leans over and whispers to him.*) You

never saw or heard of me until a month ago. Remember that!

STOUTER. What's your game?

ELKINS. That's my secret!

STOUTER. I begin to smell a rat! (*Rises.*) The stake is a woman!

ELKINS. You're barking up the wrong tree again, Stouter. (*Laughingly.*) However, that makes little difference, provided you forget that you met me in Wyoming three years ago.

STOUTER. Luckily for you I did, or the Vigilantes would have strung you up like a leg of mutton. You were a tough one then and I don't think you have improved morally since you killed—

ELKINS (*placing his hand over STOUTER'S mouth*). Silence! Would you ruin me? If she were to hear you—

STOUTER (*interrupting*). So there's a she in the game, eh? Who's the woman?

ELKINS. Pshaw! You're on the wrong trail—

STOUTER (*interrupting*). Well, it's the trail of a polecat, and the smell betrays it. You need watching, Elkins.

ELKINS (*angrily*). Don't talk to me like that, Stouter. If you do, I'll stick a knife into your ribs some day when you're least expecting it!

STOUTER (*laughingly*). Just as you did that cowboy at Laramie after you had robbed him, eh?

ELKINS (*making a significant motion as if to draw a knife, then thinking better of it, laughs and extends his hand*). It is useless to seek to intimidate you, Stouter. Let us be friends, for I clearly am in your power. Help me out in the game I'm playing and I will pay you \$1,000.

STOUTER (*surprised*). One thousand dollars! What's the scheme?

ELKINS (*in whisper after looking about cautiously*). I'm going to marry Hazel Wilkins.

STOUTER. Oh, ho! That's it, is it? Well, you've got another guess coming as far as that girl is concerned.

ELKINS. What's that?

STOUTER. There are two propositions you appear to have lost sight of. First, you're not worthy to tie her shoe laces. Second, she loves another.

ELKINS. You are candid, Stouter. As for being unworthy, that cuts little ice with me. Who is my rival?

STOUTER. Dr. Arthur Markham.

ELKINS (*starts*). She never shall be his wife!

STOUTER. If your wish could prevent it, I don't doubt your prophesy would be realized. But in this instance Hazel Wilkins is likely to cast the deciding vote.

ELKINS. No, her father, Uncle Jared, will decide the point, and as I have a powerful weapon by which to force him to aid my cause, he will choose me as his son-in-law unless you betray me.

STOUTER. How about that other woman?

ELKINS (*starts*). What woman?

STOUTER. Grace Stollard.

ELKINS. She is dead.

STOUTER. Where and when?

ELKINS. In Montana, three years ago.

STOUTER (*looking ELKINS squarely in the face*). You lie!

ELKINS (*starts*). Be careful, Stouter. My patience is not inexhaustible. What do you mean?

STOUTER. Simply that I saw her at Berkeley last night.

ELKINS (*nervously*). Impossible! I tell you she is dead!

STOUTER. Then it was her spirit! I wish I had a good horn of spirits now. (*Walks up C.*) This high altitude plays hob with my nerves.

ELKINS (*glaring after him savagely—aside*). He knows too much! How shall I rid myself of him? (*Turns to house R.*)

STOUTER (*at R. U. E.*). See you later, Elkins.

ELKINS (*going to STOUTER at R. U. E.*). Be silent for three days and if my plans succeed you shall have more money than you ever had before. Should they fail—then I promise you I shall leave this place forever.

STOUTER. Well, I shall give you a chance to win her, but if you do any dirty work, just watch out for me. See? (*He looks at ELKINS significantly and exits R. U. E.*)

Enter SCOTT from house R. He sees ELKINS up R. and stands on veranda watching him.

SCOTT (*aside*). There's that snake, Elkins! I'll keep my eye on him and if he gives me half a chance, I'll spile his face!

ELKINS (*looking off R. U. E.*). We shall see, my friend! (*Turns down C.—aside.*) It is, after all, a simple affair. (*Takes a letter from his pocket and opens it.*) This letter from the lawyers at Montevideo prove her claim to the \$60,000 estate of her uncle, William Wilkins, who died three months ago.

SCOTT (*on veranda—aside*). What the old Harry is he talking to himself about? I'd like to read that letter.

ELKINS (*at C., aside*). Her claim must be filed before January 1 next or the property will escheat to the State. I'll see that it is properly filed, and in time, too. (*Puts letter back into pocket. Hubbub of women's voices heard off L. U. E. Goes up L. and looks off—aside.*) There comes Hazel. Shall I speak to her now? Yes, it is better so. If Markham is the stumbling block in my path to her heart, then the sooner I know the truth, the quicker will this obstacle be removed. (*Comes down C.*)

SCOTT (*aside*). I must get that letter somehow. (*Exit into house.*)

Enter HAZEL in white summer costume, straw hat and carrying a parasol L. U. E. She stands at entrance and waves her hand as she looks off. Women's voices again heard off L. U. E.

WOMAN (*offstage*). You won't disappoint us, Hazel?

HAZEL. No. I promise to join you at the picnic to-morrow.

WOMAN (*offstage*). All right! (*Clamor of voices grows fainter and finally dies away.*)

HAZEL (*waving her hand off L. U. E.*) Good-bye! (*She comes down C. and on seeing ELKINS starts with gesture of repugnance. To ELKINS.*) You here, Mr. Elkins!

ELKINS (*at R. C.*). I trust my presence does not annoy you, Miss Wilkins?

HAZEL (*laughs*). I leave that to your judgment, sir.

ELKINS. I have called to see you upon an important matter—(*pausing*).

HAZEL. An important matter? Surely it does not concern me?

ELKINS. You above all others, Miss Wilkins.

HAZEL (*surprised*). Indeed!

ELKINS (*going to her at L. C.*). Before I do so, permit me to renew the conversation we had after the church service last Sunday—

HAZEL (*interrupting*). No! I told you then, and I repeat it now, I never can be your wife?

ELKINS. Is it because you have not yet learned to love me?

HAZEL. I do not love you—!

ELKINS (*interrupting*). That is because you do not know my heart.

HAZEL (*turning up C. indignantly*). Enough! I refuse to discuss this conversation further! Let this be final!

ELKINS (*passionately*). But I love you, and as long as my heart is stirred by the promptings of my passion, it will be impossible for me to cease my efforts to win your love! (*Takes her hand suddenly*). Listen to me, Hazel! My love is pure. Do not disdain to accept it! I am an honorable man—be my wife!

HAZEL (*interrupting as she wrests her hand from his clutch*). Stop! I shall not listen to you! If you persist, I shall call for help!

ELKINS (*after a pause, angrily*). Perhaps, if I were Dr. Markham, you would be more complaisant.

HAZEL (*starts*). Dr. Markham!

ELKINS. Let me warn you not to pin your faith to that man, if you would not rue it to your dying day.

HAZEL (*startled*). What do you mean?

ELKINS (*sighs*). Some day, perhaps, you shall know the truth.

HAZEL (*mystified*). The truth! Explain!

ELKINS. Wherefore? You would not believe me.

HAZEL (*greatly perturbed*). Believe what?

ELKINS. This man who dares to aspire to your hand is—

Clatter of falling dishes offstage in house R. Loud altercation between LUCINDA and SALLIE follows. ELKINS and HAZEL turn towards house and enter LUCINDA. She stands on veranda and speaks to someone offstage angrily.

LUCINDA (*shaking her fists*). There, you have done it, you stupid girl! You've dropped the vegetables and now what will Uncle Jared do for his supper?

SALLIE (*offstage R.*). A little fast won't hurt him, Aunt Lucinda.

Enter SALLIE from house. She carries the fragments of some dishes and her dress is soiled.

LUCINDA (*trying to strike SALLIE*). Law sakes! What impudence!

SALLIE (*dodging blow and running off veranda*). 'Tain't fair to swing your right at me when my hands are full, auntie.

HAZEL (*laughingly, to SALLIE*). What in the world has happened, Sallie?

SALLIE (*going to table L. C.*). Why, them French heels tripped me up and I took a header. (*She puts fragments of dishes onto the table. ELKINS laughs and walks up C. LUCINDA comes to table. HAZEL stands to R. of table.*)

HAZEL. Why are you so stupid, Sallie?

SALLIE (*indignantly*). It ain't stupid when your French heels and court train throw you down. It's misfortunate.

LUCINDA (*working at table*). Mercy sakes! Don't talk foolish! The damage's done, so we'll have to make the best of it. Uncle Jared will be here in a minute, so get busy with them chairs.

SALLIE (*going to veranda*). Sure, Mike. (*Sees ELKINS up C.*) Hello! There's Hugh Elkins! Now I know who hoodooed me! (*Grabs chair viciously and fetches it to table, repeating the operation until three chairs have been brought.*)

LUCINDA (*to ELKINS*). Good evening, Mr. Elkins. Won't you stop and have a bite with us?

SALLIE (*aside*). I'd like to bite him, only I'm afraid he might pizen me.

ELKINS (*coming down to L. C.*). Thank you, Aunt Lucinda, but I cannot accept your kind offer. I have an important engagement at the hotel.

SALLIE (*at L. of table, to ELKINS*). Goin' to play poker with Sam Collins, the postmaster, I reckon?

LUCINDA. Law sakes! What a girl!

ELKINS (*laughingly*). Don't mind her. She means no harm.

SALLIE. Nope, I don't mean nobody no harm, but I wish some persons I know would duck out of the country.

ELKINS (*aside, as he looks angrily at SALLIE*). I'd like to wring her neck.

HAZEL (*going to veranda*). Did you lock up my jewel case, mother?

ELKINS (*aside*). Jewel case!

LUCINDA (*at table*). Mercy sakes! I found it on your dresser, where any tramp could have found it, Hazel. You ought to be more careful with \$500 worth of diamonds, or you'll lose them some day. -

ELKINS (*aside*). Five hundred dollars worth of diamonds!

HAZEL (*laughingly at door of house R.*). I shall be more careful of them in future, I promise you. (*Exit into house R.*)

ELKINS (*looking at watch*). It is growing late and I must hurry. (*To others.*) Good afternoon.

SALLIE (*bowing to ELKINS*). There ain't no ropes tied to you, Elkins. Skiddoo!

LUCINDA (*shocked*). Law sakes! I'm ashamed of you, Sallie. (*To ELKINS.*) Sorry to see you go, Mr. Elkins.

ELKINS. I may have occasion to return after supper, Aunt Lucinda. (*Goes to L. U. E.*)

SALLIE (*aside*). May the devil catch him!

ELKINS (*at L. U. E., aside*). Diamonds worth \$500! This is news indeed! (*Exit L. U. E.*)

LUCINDA (*as she works with dishes at table*). I wonder what Jared finds to admire in that man. He makes me feel

creepy, but I have to be polite, you know, even though it goes ag'in the grain, sometimes.

SALLIE. I wish I was a detective—a regular Sherlock Holmes.

LUCINDA. Law sakes! What for?

SALLIE. So I could put Elkins so deep in jail nobody never would find him again.

LUCINDA. Why do you hate him so?

SALLIE. Just because he rasps my jaspers.

JARED (*offstage R. U. E.*). Put up that hoss, Bill, and arter you have rubbed him down, give him them oats.

LUCINDA. There's Jared at last!

Enter JARED in regulation country costume, carrying a pitchfork on his shoulder R. U. E. He comes slowly down C. and after putting pitchfork up against veranda rail, rolls up his sleeves and goes to bench down R.

JARED (*to others*). Here I be, Lucinda. Howdy, Sallie? (*Washes hands at bench.*)

SALLIE (*at table*). Oh, just middlin'.

LUCINDA. What kept you so late, Jared?

JARED (*laughingly as he washes*). Geewhillikins! I had a all-fired tussle with the red calf down in the stubblefield. The blamed critter wouldn't let me pass. He wanted to butt me.

SALLIE. Must a thought you was somebody's goat.

JARED (*laughingly*). I don't know about that Sallie, but I plumb hed to knock him down and set upon him till Bill could come and save his gol durned hide from a beating.

SALLIE. Whose hide? Bill's?

JARED (*indignantly*). Gol ding it! Don't you understand English? By chowder! But I got most powerful angry at that cussed critter!

SALLIE (*laughingly*). I'd like to see you angry sometime, Uncle Jared. What do you do when you get real riled?

JARED (*coming C.*). Do? Why, I make the fur fly so's you kaint see nothin'! My, but that calf actooly made me use a powerful cuss word!

LUCINDA (*shocked*). You cussed, Jared!

SALLIE (*laughingly*). What was it, Uncle Jared?

JARED (*mysteriously*). You won't tell Deacon Jones if I tell it, will you, now?

LUCINDA. Law sakes! Don't you dare to shock me, Jared!

SALLIE. I'm dying to be shocked.

JARED (*chuckling*). Waal, when I was a-settin' on that calf, waitin' for Bill to come up, durned if the pesky critter didn't toss up his legs and turn me over like a barrel. But I caught him by the windpipe and said—(*looks about nervously*) said, "Not by a dam sight, you onery bunch of uncooked veal!"

LUCINDA (*shocked*). Law sakes! How could you swear like that?

SALLIE (*piously*). Sure, Uncle Jared. Why did you say dam sight when mill site is as easy?

JARED. By gravy! I never thought of mill site. Mine's mostly hind sight and dinged poor at that when I'm tradin' hosses or cattle with Squire Watson, durn his hide!

Enter HAZEL from house R. She comes C.

JARED (*to HAZEL*). How's my own little gal? (*Kisses her.*) Been down to Berkeley buyin' new hats and things, eh?

HAZEL. No, father. There was a meeting of the Woman's Corps and we arranged for a picnic in the glen tomorrow. You must all go.

SALLIE. Count me in, Hazel.

JARED. Me, too, by ginger! Nothin' makes me feel so young and skittish like as a good old-fashioned picnic. Be gosh! Be you goin' to dance?

HAZEL. Of course. The Berkeley band will be there and we'll have the time of our lives! (*Goes to table.*)

JARED (*dancing about*). When it comes to dancing, be gosh! I'll knock the tarnation spots off the best toe skipper in Plum Valley. (*Dancing about lightly*). Oh, I'm a regular toe dancer from gay Paree!

LUCINDA (*at table*). Supper! (*To HAZEL.*) Law sakes! Uncle Jared is allus putting me to trouble. We're eating out

under the trees just because it's cooler than in the kitchen. A sorter picnic we're making of it, you know.

JARED (*going to table L. C.*). By ginger! That sounds better to me than Gabriel's horn at the gates of New Jerusalem! I haint hed nothin' to eat since noon and mv innards has an ijee my weazen hes been cut.

Enter MARKHAM L. U. E. He stands upstage and watches.

LUCINDA. You set right down there, Jared. (*Points to chair R. of table.*) You, Hazel, set down next to your dad and Sallie will squat next to you. Where's Charlie?

SALLIE (*sitting L. at table*). Milking the cows.

JARED (*sitting R. at table*). We kaint afford to wait on Charlie onless we want to starve, and that would give Plum Valley a black eye as a model health resort. (*Discovers MARKHAM.*) By ginger! There be Dr. Markham! (*To MARKHAM.*) Come down hyar, Doctor. You ain't afeared, be you?

HAZEL (*rising and meeting MARKHAM*). Good afternoon, Doctor.

MARKHAM (*coming down C.*). Good afternoon, Hazel.

JARED. Set right down and have some supper. Fall in, everybody.

MARKHAM (*sitting L. at table opposite to HAZEL*). Thank you.

JARED (*to MARKHAM*). I s'pose you've got things fixed so's you can stay awhile, Doctor?

MARKHAM. Yes, I shall be delighted to avail myself of your invitation to spend a few days in Plum Valley. What a charming place, to be sure.

HAZEL (*rapturously*). Perfectly lovely, Doctor. I do so love the country with its beauties and wholesomeness!

JARED. By gravy! Beauties of nature is all right fur them that loves that sort of thing, but, do you know, I sometimes have a hankering after the beauties one meets in New York.

LUCINDA (*shocked*). Law sakes! How dare you talk like that!

JARED. Oh, I don't mean them two-legged beauties you meet at the theaters, but the beauties of architecture—they skyscrapers and tall buildings. Them's the beauties I mean.

LUCINDA (*mollified*). That's different. They don't harm nobody.

JARED. I should say not, by sassafras! Waal, Doctor, how be your practice getting on?

MARKHAM. Splendidly! I got a new patient today.

LUCINDA. Law sakes! Who's sick now?

MARKHAM. Mrs. Birch of Pendleton.

JARED. Geewhillikins! I know her husband. He and I wus partners in a land deal down to Botany P'int. (*Sighs.*) Waal, he's got the land now, gol ding him!

SALLIE (*putting salt into JARED's cup*). And what have you got, Uncle Jared?

JARED (*sipping his coffee and spitting it out*). 'Pears to me I've got a bad taste in my mouth, by gravy! (*All laugh.*)

MARKHAM (*laughingly*). I heard Birch was skilled in high finance. He must be to own all the property he does in New Hampshire.

HAZEL. Surely he is. It is a rapid age and men engaged in the battle of finance must be cold and unscrupulous. Poor papa has discovered that to his cost.

JARED. That's what I have, by gravy! Men like Birch ought to be lynched!

LUCINDA. You ought to be ashamed of yourself Jared! Lynching don't prevent crime.

JARED. You bet it do. I never heard tell on any man committing a crime arter he was good and well lynched. (*All laugh.*)

MARKHAM (*laughingly*). A very practical view of the matter, Uncle Jared.

LUCINDA. Law sakes! If the deacon heard Jared talking like this, there would be a vacancy in our pew next Sunday.

JARED. That don't skeer me, Lucinda. If my brother Billy, him that went to South America and sent Hazel them jewels a year ago, were here, you'd hear different talk.

MARKHAM. By the way, have you heard from your brother lately?

JARED. Not since he sent them diamonds to Hazel for a present. I haint seen him for forty years. How d'ye come to come to think of him?

MARKHAM. I received an anonymous letter this morning which explains itself. (*Takes letter from pocket and gives it to HAZEL.*) Read it, Miss Wilkins.

HAZEL (*looking at letter*). From a woman, doubtless. (*Reads.*) "Dr. Markham—Dear Sir: You are a friend of Uncle Jared Wilkins and his daughter, Hazel, living in Plum Valley. Warn them that a serpent is lying in their path."

JARED. She must have been thinking of snakes. (*All laugh.*)

HAZEL (*continues reading*). "I have reason to know that a brother of Jared Wilkins died in South America some months ago and that this has been made the basis of a diabolical plot by an unscrupulous man. Tell them to be on their guard. More than this I cannot say at this time." (*Folds letter.*) The letter is unsigned.

JARED. Poor Billy dead!

LUCINDA (*sighingly*). Law sakes! That is sorry news, if it's true.

JARED. Although I haint seen him in forty years, I remember him as if he said good-bye to me yesterday. He was a brave chap, and when it come to hayin' in harvest time, my! how he did make things hum! So Billy's dead! Poor Billy!

LUCINDA. I remember the year of the big snow some twenty year ago, when you sent him \$200.

JARED. By Hek! He needed the money, poor little runt!

LUCINDA. But it was a cold winter and when you sent him all that money, Jared, it made things powerful tight for all of us.

JARED. So it did, Lucinda. But it's past now, and it made me durned happy to help him out, even if it did pinch us a little. (*Rises.*) I've got his picture in the sitting room. Guess I'll take a peek at it, just to revive old memories. Poor Billy! Dead and gone! (*Goes to house R.*)

LUCINDA. Don't be gone long, Jared.

JARED. I'll be back in a minute, Lucinda. (*Exit into house R.*)

HAZEL. This is a mysterious warning. How should the writer of this letter be in possession of this information? What does it all mean?

MARKHAM. We must await developments.

LUCINDA. Well, that's all we can do, Doctor. (*Picking up dishes.*) Come along, now, Sallie, with them dishes. If you drop any more of them, we'll have to go to the poor house. (*Goes to door of house R.*)

SALLIE (*taking up dishes*). If them French heels don't trip me up again, I'll get through to the pantry all right. (*Goes to door of house R.*)

LUCINDA. Be careful, Sallie. (*Exit into house R.*)

SALLIE (*going up veranda*). You lead, I follow, Aunt Lucinda.

HAZEL. Be careful of that court train, Sallie. Don't let it throw you off the track again.

SALLIE. All right, Hazel. If it does, I'll borrow one of Aunt Lucinda's switches and sidetrack it. (*Exit laughingly into house R.*)

MARKHAM (*rising and going to L. C.*). Doubtless you suspect to whom this letter refers, Miss Wilkins?

HAZEL (*at R. C.*). You mean—?

MARKHAM. Hugh Elkins.

Enter ELKINS L. U. E. He stands upstage and listens.

HAZEL (*thoughtfully*). I believe you are right, Doctor. He has been annoying me of late.

MARKHAM (*anxiously*). Annoying you? How?

HAZEL. He persists in forcing odious attentions upon me—

MARKHAM. Attentions?

HAZEL. An hour ago, here, he asked me to be his wife.

MARKHAM (*eagerly*). And your reply?

HAZEL. Was that I could never love him.

MARKHAM. Your words lift an immense weight from my heart, for since that day we met a year ago—(*pauses*).

HAZEL (*emotion*). Yes—?

MARKHAM (*after a pause*). I felt that I was not altogether indifferent to you.

HAZEL. You are right.

MARKHAM (*taking her hand*). May I hope that in time I may inspire a warmer sentiment in your heart—say, love?

HAZEL (*tremulously*). Love!

MARKHAM. Aye, love! Believe me, I love you with all my heart!

HAZEL. You love me!

MARKHAM (*embracing her*). Aye, devotedly. From the day we met my love has been growing steadily, increasing in intensity, so that now it is a flame that is consuming me, and I shall find peace of soul only when you tell me that my love is returned.

HAZEL (*embracing him*). Arthur!

MARKHAM (*kissing her*). My darling!

ELKINS (*coming down C—to others*). Pardon me.

MARKHAM (*turning to ELKINS*). You here!

HAZEL (*turning to L. C.*). Ah!

ELKINS (*sarcastically*). I appear to be *de trop*. I trust I have not disturbed you?

HAZEL (*crossing to veranda*). Excuse me if I retire.

ELKINS (*at C.*). Pardon me, Miss Wilkins. What I have to say concerns you almost as much as it does Dr. Markham.

MARKHAM. What have you to say, sir?

ELKINS (*curtly*). Excuse me, Dr. Markham. What I have to say I prefer to divulge to Miss Wilkins alone.

HAZEL. Dr. Markham is my friend. You may speak to me in his presence.

ELKINS (*laughingly*). Well, I regret that circumstances forced me to interrupt you at the moment when, I fancy, Dr. Markham was about to propose for your hand, Miss Wilkins.

HAZEL (*indignantly*). How dare you!

MARKHAM. Leave us, Hazel. Let me deal with this man.

ELKINS. Miss Wilkins will find it to her advantage to hear what I have to say.

MARKHAM (*facing ELKINS C.*). And you may find it to your advantage to cease annoying her.

ELKINS. Do you threaten me?

MARKHAM. Interpret my words as you choose.

ELKINS (*angrily*). Enough of this, Dr. Markham! (*To HAZEL.*) I find it necessary, Miss Wilkins, to warn you that the character of this man who seeks your hand in marriage is not above reproach.

MARKHAM (*threateningly*). Scoundrel!

ELKINS. This man is a forger!

HAZEL (*starts*). Forger!

MARKHAM (*starts as if to strike ELKINS, but suddenly stands C. in dejected attitude*). Ah!

ELKINS (*laughingly*). See. He is silent! He betrays his guilt, even if this does not. (*Takes paper from pocket, opens it and gives it to HAZEL, pointing to a paragraph.*) Read that!

HAZEL (*taking newspaper and reading*). "\$1,000 Reward. A reward of \$1,000 will be paid for any information that will lead to the arrest and conviction of Arthur Markham, wanted here for forgery. Address, Chief of Detectives, New York City."

MARKHAM (*sadly, at C.*). My God!

HAZEL (*despairingly, to MARKHAM*). Can this be true, Arthur? Speak!

MARKHAM (*sadly*). My lips are sealed. I cannot answer you!

ELKINS (*triumphantly*). He means, he dare not!

MARKHAM (*to HAZEL*). I cannot explain this now. Grant me a few days and you shall know the truth.

HAZEL (*tearfully*). He cannot explain!

ELKINS (*to HAZEL*). It was to save you from falling into the clutches of this unconvicted felon—

MARKHAM (*striking ELKINS*). Wretch!

Enter JARED as ELKINS falls, from house R., followed by LUCINDA and SALLIE. JARED comes down steps of veranda with look of surprise on his face, while LUCINDA and SALLIE

stand on veranda and watch. HAZEL stands R. C., while MARKHAM stands C. over ELKINS.

JARED (*to MARKHAM, astonished*). Fighting, at my door? What does this mean, Dr. Markham?

MARKHAM. Let this man speak. (*Points to ELKINS.*)

ELKINS (*rising and adjusting his clothing*). He struck me and—and he shall pay my price!

JARED. Why did he strike you?

HAZEL (*to JARED*). I shall tell you, father.

MARKHAM (*despairingly*). Hazel—!

HAZEL (*pointing to ELKINS*). This man insulted me and Dr. Markham punished him!

JARED (*taking MARKHAM's hand*). You're true blue, by gravy! (*JARED and MARKHAM stand hands clasped C., HAZEL stands R. C., ELKINS, angry, stands L. C., while LUCINDA and SALLIE stand watching others, on veranda, until—*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE: AUNT LUCINDA's sitting room in 3, boxed. Interior comfortably and plainly furnished. Cheap chromos on walls here and there. Practical doors C. in F., L. U. E., and R. U. E. Open fireplace, with mantle, R. 2 E. (*This is not necessary and may be dispensed with if same cannot be obtained.*) Table, with two chairs R. C. Lamp on table. Old-fashioned sideboard to R. of C. D. Open window to R. of sideboard. Old style washstand L. C., against flat, with towel rack fastened to wall near it. Several chairs are placed L. C. and against wall L. Screen at L. 2 E. Scene is well lighted, it being night. Lamp on table is lighted and at rise discovered LUCINDA sitting L. of table darning socks, while SAL-

LIE sits R. at table reading a book. See Scene Plot for stage setting.

SALLIE (*laying book upon table*). Dear me! I just can't read and think of Dr. Markham knocking down Hugh Elkins for insulting Hazel. I wish I had seen him punch him good.

LUCINDA. If Hazel told the truth, Mr. Elkins got just what he deserved.

SALLIE (*surprised*). Of course, Hazel told the truth! Hazel ain't no fibber.

LUCINDA. No, she's been reared too well for that. But there's something behind this, I'm sure. Why should Dr. Markham strike Elkins?

SALLIE (*laughingly*). Guess Dr. Markham is jealous.

LUCINDA (*surprised*). Jealous! Law sakes! That don't explain it. Dr. Markham is a peaceable man.

SALLIE. So is old Tabby a peaceable cat until you pinch her tail, and then she shows her claws, and uses them, too.

LUCINDA. I guess you ought to know, for you've pinched it so often there's most nothing left of it except the stump.

SALLIE (*laughingly*). Poor, dear old Tabby! What gay times we've had together!

LUCINDA. I wonder what's keeping Uncle Jared? Here it's nearly nine o'clock and he ain't got back from Berkeley yet.

SALLIE (*rising*). I hope he'll see Sam Collins and have our letter box fixed. The cover's busted and anybody can steal our mail. I'm sure I saw him put a letter into the box three weeks ago, but when I went after it, it wasn't there.

LUCINDA. Nonsense! Who would go to the trouble to steal our letters?

SALLIE. I don't know, but I have my suspicions. I saw Hugh Elkins in the road just about that time.

LUCINDA. Law sakes! You don't mean to say he stole the letter?

SALLIE (*going to window R. C. in F. and looking off L.*). I can't say he did, but believe me, he'd steal this farm if it wasn't nailed to the ground. He's a regular N. G. Here comes Charlie. (*Speaking off.*) Hello, Charlie!

SCOTT (*offstage C. D.*). Hello, Sallie!

SALLIE. Seen any signs of Uncle Jared?

SCOTT. He's coming up the road.

Enter SCOTT C. D.

LUCINDA. Thank goodness, he's safe! Did you see Dr. Markham.

SCOTT. Sure. He and Hazel are sitting on the veranda.

SALLIE (*mischievously*). Was that all they were doing, Charlie?

SCOTT. Can't say, 'cause I didn't dare to look. But take it from me, there's goin' to be a weddin' in Plum Valley soon.

LUCINDA. Law sakes! Who's going to be married now?

SALLIE. Old man Stouter, I reckon.

SCOTT (*laughingly*). Geewhiz! Who'd marry that old soak?

LUCINDA. You had ought to be ashamed of yourself to speak of a poor unfortunate man like that. It's sinful!

SCOTT. Sure. It would be sinful for any female woman to marry him. I saw him down the road awhile ago.

JARED (*offstage at C. D. in F.*). Whoa!

LUCINDA (*rising*). There's Jared at last!

JARED (*offstage*). Put up that horse, Bill, and then go to bed.

BILL (*offstage L.*). All right, Uncle Jared. Good night.

JARED (*offstage*). Good night, Bill.

LUCINDA (*going to C. D. in F. and opening it*). Come in, Jared.

Enter JARED C. D. in F. He goes down C. to table, LUCINDA closing the door and following him. SCOTT and SALLIE confer near window R. C. in F.

JARED (*to LUCINDA*). Got back safe, you see, Lucinda. I'm glad to git back hum again.

LUCINDA. What's the news down to Berkeley?

JARED (*as he sits R. at table*). Nothing much. Mrs. Smith's baby has got the measles.

SALLIE. I knew that kid would get something some day.

LUCINDA. Anything more, Jared?

JARED. Sam Halliday's store came near gettin' mobbed tonight.

LUCINDA. Law sakes! What for?

JARED. Mixed sugar with sand and then raised prices.

SCOTT. He ought to be lynched.

LUCINDA (*horried*). That settles it, Jared. We don't trade with him any more.

JARED. Guess you're right, by gravy! When I want sand I'll get it in the pure state. Geewhiz! I heerd a new yarn down to the store and it's a hummer! (*Laughs.*)

SALLIE. Let's hear it, Uncle Jared.

JARED. Ted Simpkins went down to Pendleton t'other day and he stopped at a cornfield and he sees a boy leanin' on the fence. Ted says to the boy, "Your corn looks kinder yallow." Says the boy, "Yass." Says Ted, "Don't look like you'll have half a crop." Says the boy, "Nope; the landlord gets the other half." Then came the hummer!

SCOTT. Let her hum.

JARED. Then says Ted to the boy, "There ben't much difference between you and a fool, boy." Then the lad he says, "Nope, only the fence." (*Laughs.*) By gravy! That was good! He, he, he!

LUCINDA. Law sakes! What did the fence have to do with it?

JARED (*pained*). Waal, I'll be dinged! If it hadn't been for the fence, there would have been no joke. You see, the joke hung on that fence, and only for it, it would have fell down.

SALLIE. Or died of old age.

LUCINDA. Next thing you know, Jared, you'll die of laughing at your own epitaph.

JARED. I guess not, Lucinda, for it haint writ yet. (*To SALLIE and SCOTT*). You children git to bed if you're going to the picnic tomorrow.

SALLIE. I wouldn't miss the picnic for the world! Good night. (*Goes to L. U. E.*)

JARED. Good night, Sallie. Happy dreams. (*Exit SALLIE, L. U. E. To SCOTT.*) Did you nail that board down on the pig sty, Charlie?

SCOTT. Yes. Good night. (*Goes to R. U. E.*)

JARED. Good night. (*Exit SCOTT R. U. E.*)

LUCINDA (*at C.*). When be you going to bed, Jared?

JARED. In a little while. I've got a little figurin' to do before I go to roost.

LUCINDA (*going to L. U. E.*). Don't sit up too long. By the way, I want to have a long talk with you tomorrow.

JARED. What about?

LUCINDA. Hazel.

JARED (*thoughtfully*). Hazel?

LUCINDA. I've noticed that she and Dr. Markham have been quite thick together lately, haint you?

JARED. Come to think about it, I have. D'ye think they love each other?

LUCINDA. If I ain't blind, that's the situation. But, then, there's Hugh Elkins.

JARED (*starts*). What about Elkins?

LUCINDA. If I know anything about men, he's set his cap for Hazel, too.

JARED. You don't say. Who'd athought it? Well, we'll talk it over at the picnic.

LUCINDA. All right, Jared. Don't stay up too long. Good night.

JARED. Good night, Lucinda. (*Exit LUCINDA L. U. E. Takes pipe from pocket and lights it slowly.*) Gosh all pumpkins! She's just found out Elkins wants to marry Hazel. What'll she say when she learns the truth? She don't like Elkins any more than I do, and yet, if what he told me tonight is true, he holds us under his thumb.

ELKINS (*offstage at C. D. knocks at door*).

JARED. Mebbe that's him. Come in!

Enter ELKINS C. D. He comes down C. to table.

JARED (*sees ELKINS. Starts. To ELKINS*). So you've got here?

ELKINS (*sitting L. at table*). Yes, the time has come for a talk that means much to both of us.

JARED. I reckon it do, Elkins.

ELKINS. What I told you at Berkeley was merely preliminary to what I have to say to you now.

JARED. Let's come to the point, Elkins. What's your game?

ELKINS (*after a pause*). I love your daughter and am going to marry her.

JARED. You don't mean it?

ELKINS (*laughingly*). Yes, I do, and with your help she shall be my wife.

JARED. And if I refuse to help you?

ELKINS (*in whisper*). You will lose this farm and spend your declining years in the poor house.

JARED (*starts*). That's better than going to jail, where you will wind up, Elkins. And it's a pesky sight more respectable.

ELKINS. Your philosophy is weak, Jared. You are a man and may be able to stand adversity, but how about your wife?

JARED (*starts*). My wife! Great Jehovah! It would kill her!

Enter SCOTT C. D. He sees others, then creeps down L. cautiously and hides behind screen, where he listens to others, remaining unobserved.

ELKINS. Of course, it would kill her. For her sake, therefore, you will agree to my demands. I ask but little. Urge your daughter to marry me, and I swear to remain silent about the title to this farm.

JARED. You say you have proof that the title is defective?

ELKINS. Irrefutable proof. There are vital errors in the description of the boundaries which, were they known to Squire Watson, would enable him to prove his claim to almost the whole of your farm.

JARED (*after a pause*). How did you find this out?

ELKINS. That does not affect the issue. The question is, will you aid me in my suit for your daughter's hand, or shall I go to Squire Watson and tell him of my discovery?

JARED (*showing emotion*). I'd hate to let the Squire get the whiphand over me. Ever since that cattle trade five years ago, when I got the better of him, he has hated me like pizen.

ELKINS. And he would drive you out of Plum Valley if he could.

JARED. I guess so. He's an unchristianlike cuss, by gravy!

ELKINS (*taking a sealed document from his pocket*). With this document and the proofs it affords, he would not only drive you out of the valley, but appropriate your farm as well. Consent to do as I say, or this will find its way into his hands.

JARED. What proofs have I that you will keep your agreement?

ELKINS. My word of honor.

JARED (*contemptuously*). Your word of honor! Gol ding such honor as you've shown me thus far! There ain't a snake in Plum Valley as hasn't got honor to spare in comparison with you! By gravy! What brand of honor is that which forces a man to the wall as you're doing me?

ELKINS (*laughingly*). Come, everything is fair in love and war. Give me your word to do as I ask, and this document will be turned over to you at once.

JARED (*wearily*). I'm like a man in a fog and I must think it over. There will be a picnic in the glen tomorrow. You shall have my answer then.

ELKINS (*rising*). Excellent! I shall be there.

JARED. Take my advice and git out. You rile me so that my mind don't hitch well to any but thoughts of murder.

ELKINS (*laughingly*). Nonsense! You'll get over that feeling once I'm your son-in-law—

JARED (*interrupting*). Stop! You ain't reached that stage yet, so don't figure on it.

ELKINS. Very well. Good night. (*At C.*)

JARED. By the way, you haven't told me yet why Dr. Markham knocked you down arter supper tonight.

ELKINS. Hazel said it was because I insulted her.

JARED. Hazel's a mighty truthful gal. You don't mean to insinuate she was lyin'?

ELKINS. It was a lie!

JARED. If she lied, she had a reason for it. What was it?

ELKINS. She made that statement to screen Markham.

JARED (*puzzled*). To screen Markham?

ELKINS. Dr. Markham is a forger for whose arrest the New York police offer a reward of \$1,000.

JARED (*starts*). A forger! Prove it. (*Comes C.*)

ELKINS (*taking a newspaper from his pocket and handing it to JARED*). You will find the notice there, marked. Read for yourself.

JARED (*taking newspaper and glancing at it*). It's true! He is wanted for forgery and Hazel loves him!

ELKINS. When I warned her against Markham, he knocked me down. He shall pay dearly for that blow!

JARED. You showed Hazel this newspaper?

ELKINS. Yes.

JARED. Well, it must be explained afore the night has passed. (*Hands newspaper back to ELKINS.*) Good night, Elkins. You shall have my answer tomorrow. (*Exit L. U. E.*)

Enter HAZEL, followed by MARKHAM C. D. ELKINS goes up C. and on meeting them shows surprise.

HAZEL (*starts*). You here again, Mr. Elkins?

ELKINS. I came to let you know that I shall attend the picnic in the glen tomorrow.

HAZEL (*scornfully*). That is a matter that does not concern me.

ELKINS (*going to C. D.*). Perhaps Dr. Markham also will be there?

MARKHAM (*coldly*). That is my business, sir.

ELKINS. Have it as you wish. (*Aside.*) Now to play my last card. (*To others.*) Good night. (*Exit C. D.*)

HAZEL (*sitting R. at table*). How I despise that man! Would that we had never met!

MARKHAM (*sitting L. at table*). Think of him no more, Hazel. He is unworthy of notice.

HAZEL (*thoughtfully*). Somehow I fear him. He is a dangerous man.

SCOTT (*coming from behind screen and crossing to C—to HAZEL*). You're right about that, Hazel.

HAZEL (*surprised*). Where on earth did you spring from, Charlie?

SCOTT (*pointing to screen*). I was behind that screen and heard the whole shooting match.

MARKHAM. What are you talking about?

SCOTT. I was on my way to bed when I saw Elkins talking to Uncle Jared. I got behind that screen and listened to their pow-wow.

HAZEL. How dared you do that, Charlie? For shame!

SCOTT (*humbly*). You've got to fight the devil with fire or he'll get the best of you. We're all fighting Elkins and any trick we can turn on him is so much gained.

HAZEL. What were they talking about?

SCOTT. Elkins told Uncle Jared that he loved you and intended to marry you.

MARKHAM (*angrily*). The scoundrel!

SCOTT. Elkins also told Uncle Jared he would have to help him win Hazel or he would put the screws on him.

HAZEL. What did he mean by that?

SCOTT. He had a newspaper and showed him an advertisement offering \$1,000 reward for Dr. Markham's arrest.

HAZEL (*sadly*). It is terrible!

MARKHAM. How shall I convince him that my denial is true?

SCOTT. I don't care what the newspaper says, Doctor, I for one don't believe you're a crook.

MARKHAM (*offering his hand to SCOTT*). Thank you, Charlie. You are a noble chap.

SCOTT. Elkins had a document with a gold seal on it which he said was proof that Uncle Jared's title to this farm was bad, and that if Squire Watson heard of it he would take the farm and send Uncle Jared to the poor house.

MARKHAM. Is there a more contemptible wretch on earth than this man.

HAZEL (*eagerly*). What else was said, Charlie?

SCOTT. Elkins said that if Uncle Jared didn't help him to get your promise to marry him, he would tell Squire Watson and there would be the deuce to pay.

MARKHAM. We must obtain this document and frustrate his plan.

SCOTT. That's my idea, sure pop! He is to be at the picnic tomorrow to get Uncle Jared's answer. I'll get that document, even if I have to hold him up at the muzzle of a rusty pepper-box.

MARKHAM. We do not want to act rashly in this matter, Charlie. I'll see you in the morning and we will discuss our plan.

SCOTT (*yawning*). Geewhiz! I'm tired. Guess I'll go to bed now. Good night. (*Goes to R. U. E.*)

MARKHAM. Good night. (*Exit SCOTT R. U. E.*)

HAZEL. How shall we foil this monster?

MARKHAM. We shall find the weapons, Hazel. We have justice on our side and cannot fail.

Enter JARED L. U. E. He comes C.

HAZEL (*rising and meeting JARED C.*). Father! (*She embraces him.*)

JARED (*kissing HAZEL*). How be you, Hazel?

HAZEL. You look worried, father. Come, tell us what has happened. (*Leads him to chair R. at table and as he sits she kneels by his side, her elbows resting upon his knees.*)

JARED. Nothing much has happened, Hazel. I worked rather hard today and am tired, that's all.

HAZEL. You are hiding something from me, father. Has it to do with Mr. Elkins, who was here just now?

JARED (*caressing her*). Tut, tut, child! Don't cross the bridge afore you come to it. Now, I'm going to ask you a question.

HAZEL (*anxiously*). Well?

JARED. Why did you fib when you told me Dr. Markham struck Elkins because he insulted you?

HAZEL. I spoke the truth—he did insult me.

JARED. How?

HAZEL. By asking me to be his wife.

JARED (*laughs*). By gravy! That wouldn't be no insult to some old maids in Plum Valley that I knows on.

HAZEL. Why speak of him father? He is odious to me.

JARED. There's another reason, child. What is it?

HAZEL (*shyly*). There is, father. I love Dr. Markham.

JARED. I thought so.

MARKHAM (*at R. C.*). And I love her with all my soul!

JARED (*after a pause*). Love you—a forger and fugitive with a price on your head!

MARKHAM. You don't believe that, Uncle Jared?

HAZEL. It is untrue, father. Arthur is no forger.

JARED. But I saw the advertisement in the newspaper offering a reward for your arrest. How do you explain that?

MARKHAM. It is a dreadful mistake which will be cleared to your satisfaction some day, I promise you.

JARED. Can you clear it now?

MARKHAM. Not without violating a promise I made, Uncle Jared. Believe me, I am as innocent of this odious charge as yourself.

JARED. An innocent man will not remain silent when his honesty and reputation are questioned.

MARKHAM. But you do not understand. I am not the Arthur Markham named in this advertisement.

JARED (*starts*). By gravy! Who the old Harry is it, then?

MARKHAM. My cousin. We were schoolmates, chums, in the same college two years ago. We promised to stand by each other through thick and thin, be the cost to the other what it might. My cousin, unfortunately, gambled at the race course and one day went beyond his depth.

JARED. Them chaps generally do.

MARKHAM. He was in financial-distress and was heavily in debt to a man who, strangely enough, was his rival in a love affair. In order to discredit my cousin in the estimation of the woman he loved, this man, as I have reason to believe, caused a note to be forged and openly charged my cousin with the crime.

JARED. The skunk!

MARKHAM. Convinced that he would establish his innocence in time, my cousin left for the West in search of a former employe of his accuser, and in a fit of generosity I told my cousin I would shoulder his burden until his innocence was proven. I thereupon told this man that my cousin was innocent and that if anyone was guilty, it was I!

JARED. Gosh all pumpkins!

HAZEL (*sadly*). It is terrible!

JARED. But where is your cousin now?

MARKHAM. He was in New Mexico when I last heard from him three months ago. He said he was on the track of his man and that he hoped soon to find and force a confession from him. With every mail it may come. God grant it may come soon!

JARED. By ginger! Then you ain't guilty?

MARKHAM. I swear it upon my honor!

JARED. I believe you, by gravy! Here's my hand upon it! (*Business. Aside to MARKHAM.*) Leave us for awhile, Doctor.

MARKHAM. I thank you for your confidence in me. (*Exit R. U. E.*)

JARED (*to HAZEL*). That man's all right, Hazel. But now that we're alone, I have an important matter to call to your attention.

HAZEL (*surprised*). Important matter!

JARED. It affects our future welfare and means everything to your mother and—and me.

HAZEL (*agitated*). I begin to see now! You refer to the flaw in the title to our farm which Elkins says he has discovered.

JARED (*starts in surprise*). By beeswax! How did you find that out, Hazel?

HAZEL. Charlie, who heard all behind that screen, told me.

JARED. So he's been listening to things that don't concern him! I'll warm his jacket good tomorrow.

HAZEL. No, he will assist us in battling against this wretched man who would ruin us.

JARED (*sighingly*). I'm afraid we'll need all the help we can get. You don't like Elkins. I can see that. And yet it might be better for all of us in the end if you didn't hate him so.

HAZEL. What do you mean?

JARED. Elkins says if you don't marry him, he will send me to the poor house. I wouldn't mind that for myself, but when I think of your old mother—God bless her heart! the thought of her suffering drives me well nigh crazy!

HAZEL (*pleadingly*). Father!

JARED. If Elkins carries out his threat and we are unable to disprove his claim, could you—would you marry him to save your mother and me?

HAZEL. I gladly would die for you, father.

JARED (*caressing her*). God bless you! The blood of the Wilkinses, who fought in the revolution, spoke when you said that! I hope and pray the day never may come when you sacrifice your happiness to save your parents.

LUCINDA (*offstage L. U. E—Calls*). Jared!

JARED (*starts*). What is it, Lucinda?

LUCINDA (*offstage*). What's keeping you so late?

JARED. I'm reading a funny story. Gee, but it's a hummer! I'll tell you all about it tomorrow and you'll split your sides laughing.

LUCINDA (*offstage*). All right, Jared.

JARED (*sighingly*). I hope Gabriel won't punish me too hard for that little fib. (*To HAZEL.*) We must keep this between us, Hazel. Your mother must never know the truth!

HAZEL (*tearfully*). She shall not know, father. If it becomes necessary for me to sacrifice myself, I shall marry this man, even though it breaks my heart. (*Weeps at JARED'S knee.*)

JARED (*caressing her and speaking in broken voice*). I hope heaven will see to it that you ain't forced to take that step, my girl. Yet the thought of giving up the old farm on which I was born and bred would send my gray hairs to the grave. (*Loud knock at C. D.*) Come in!

Enter SIMPKINS C. D. He comes down C.

JARED (*to SIMPKINS*). Ted Simpkins, by gravy! What on earth do you want here at this hour, Ted?

SIMPKINS (*looking about*). I'm searching for Dr. Markham? Has he gone to bed yet?

Enter MARKHAM R. U. E. He stands at door and watches. HAZEL rises and stands R. C.

JARED (*rising and coming C.*). Can't say, Ted. What do you want of him?

SIMPKINS (*at L. C.*). I'd ruther tell him, if you don't mind, Jared. (*Turns R. and sees MARKHAM—to MARKHAM*). So you're here, be you?

MARKHAM (*coming down C.*). What can I do for you, Ted?

SIMPKINS. I s'pose you've seen that advertisement—(*pauses*).

MARKHAM. Offering a reward for my arrest?

SIMPKINS. That's it, Doc.

HAZEL (*agitated*). What is your purpose in coming here, Mr. Simpkins? (*Goes C.*)

SIMPKINS. To arrest Dr. Markham!

MARKHAM (*starts*). The blow has fallen!

HAZEL (*clinging to MARKHAM*). No, no! You shall not arrest him here in my father's house!

Enter ELKINS C. D. He stands at door and watches.

JARED (*to SIMPKINS*). There ben't no need to talk of arrestin' Dr. Markham, Ted. I'll go his bail to my last dollar, by gravy!

ELKINS (*coming down C.—to JARED*). On what security, Uncle Jared? Your farm?

JARED (*angrily*). I believe this is your dirty work, Elkins. Now listen to me. I'll scotch you yet, by ginger.

HAZEL (*to MARKHAM*). You must not submit to this indignity nor make this humiliating sacrifice to save your cousin, Arthur! I pray you, tell all you have told me and save yourself from arrest.

MARKHAM. It would avail me nothing, Hazel. He would not believe me. Come, have courage! This arrest means nothing and can do me little harm.

ELKINS (*aside to SIMPKINS*). What are you waiting for, Ted? Do your duty. (*Points to MARKHAM.*)

SIMPKINS. I guess it be all right, but where you are concerned, Elkins, I feel shaky about the hull business. (*To MARKHAM.*) I'm sorry, Doc, but my duty's plain. You are my prisoner.

HAZEL (*tearfully*). No, no!

MARKHAM (*thrusting HAZEL from him gently*). I'm ready.

SIMPKINS (*producing handcuffs*). I hate to do it, Doc, but I can't get out of it. (*Handcuffs MARKHAM.*)

HAZEL (*horrified*). No, not those handcuffs—my God! (*Staggeres and faints in JARED's arms.*)

MARKHAM. Poor girl!

JARED (*kneeling beside prostrate form of HAZEL—to ELKINS*). Beware a father's vengeance! (*JARED stands C. over HAZEL, who lies outstretched before him. MARKHAM stands to L. of JARED, with SIMPKINS at L. C. ELKINS stands R. C., smiling sardonically, until—*)

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE: *A wooded glen, full stage. Set trees, R. and L., with landscape backing. Rustic seat capable of seating three or four persons R. C. Shrubbery and bushes R. and L., to beautify scene, some of them tall enough to screen a person hiding behind them. Grasses and leaves on ground and a log here and there, if easily procurable. Stage well lighted, it being nearly noon. See Scene Plot for stage setting.*

At rise enter GRACE R. U. E.

GRACE (*coming down C. and looking about furtively*). This must be the place to which Stouter referred. Where can he be? (*Hum of voices in distance heard offstage L. She looks off L. 2 E.*) There are several persons coming this way. They are carrying baskets. A party of picnickers, doubtless. (*Turns R. C.*) Am I doing right when I plot the downfall of—of—him? Yes; I have nothing to reproach myself with. He treated me like a dog. Now let him suffer! If I succeed in accomplishing his downfall as he did mine, then I shall be satisfied!

STOUTER (*offstage R. U. E., singing tipsily*). "For he's a jolly good fellow, which nobody can deny."

GRACE (*going to R. U. and looking off*). It is Stouter. He seems to be intoxicated. Ugh! Why will men persist in drinking when they know it means their utter ruin?

Enter STOUTER R. U. E. He staggers slightly as he comes down C. and sings softly to himself until he discovers GRACE at R. C. He then pauses and draws himself together with the ostensible design of deluding her as to his condition.

GRACE (*at R. C.*). So you have come, Mr. Stouter?

STOUTER (*laughingly*). Sure, Miss Stollard. You didn't think I would disappoint you, did you? I'm too gallant a man to fail to keep appointments with ladies.

GRACE. This is not an affair of gallantry, Mr. Stouter, but of business. We have little time to lose.

STOUTER. I've got more time than money, I confess. But don't be afraid of me, Miss Stollard. I'm only a man and a little full at that.

GRACE. You need not tell me that, Mr. Stouter. You succeed splendidly in advertising your condition.

STOUTER. 'Scuse me. I'm not drunk, but merely affected by the high altitude.

GRACE (*laughingly*). High altitude!

STOUTER. Sure. It always makes me feel weak in the knees and people often mistake my symptoms for the effects of a common ordinary jag. That's the way reputations are ruined.

GRACE (*laughingly*). I have neither time nor inclination to discuss your philosophy, Mr. Stouter. You know Hugh Elkins?

STOUTER. I regret to say I do.

GRACE. Why do you regret that fact?

STOUTER. Because I'm extremely particular as to the character of my acquaintances, and I admit with shame that Elkins deceived me.

GRACE. You're not the first man he deceived, or woman either. He is a wretch who disgraces the name of man!

STOUTER. Right you are! If I were to dispute that, I'd be lying, and I'm a regular George Washington, first in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen, when it comes to speaking the truth, even though it breaks me.

GRACE (*mystified*). Breaks you?

STOUTER. Sure—busted, broke, lacking the rhino, spondulicks, shinplasters and the like. I'll confess to you, madam, that at this moment I'm as dead broke as a Bowery bum.

GRACE. Don't let that disturb you, Mr. Stouter. Help me and I assure you your financial condition will be considerably improved.

STOUTER. That's encouraging. How can I help you?

GRACE. That you shall learn soon. You knew Elkins in the West?

STOUTER. Sure, I did, and a tougher guy never traveled

the pike to Sing Sing. Believe me, I speak from an intimate knowledge of the facts. I've been there.

GRACE. At Sing Sing?

STOUTER. No. (*Here insert name of prison of State in which this drama is presented.*)

GRACE. You are right. He is a bad man! How I hate him!

STOUTER. Ditto here.

GRACE (*in whisper*). I have traced him to this place in furtherance of my plan of vengeance—to bring him to justice!

STOUTER. Then you will have to stretch his neck, for that's the only justice that will fit his case.

GRACE. I have no desire to go to that extreme. There are vengeancees far keener and more enjoyable.

STOUTER. Yes, you might roast him over a slow fire.

GRACE. I want to drag him down to grovel upon the earth as he dragged me down and made me grovel until now I am ashamed to face my own people!

STOUTER (*laughingly*). I'd like to see Elkins grovel. He wouldn't look like a bird of paradise at that game.

GRACE. Are you with me in this work?

STOUTER. To my last drop of blood, Miss Stollard. I've got a choice assortment of faults, but I'm not a tin horn gambler, thief and murderer yet!

GRACE. Elkins is all these and more. He plans to marry Hazel Wilkins. That is his latest villainy.

STOUTER. So he told me. Oh, he'd do anything! He's rank enough to steal a nickel's worth of Limburger cheese.

GRACE (*looking about cautiously—both are at C.*). Did he tell you why he seeks to marry this girl?

STOUTER. I believe some relatives in South America died and left her a wad of money big enough to choke a cow.

GRACE. I know it.

STOUTER (*suspiciously*). By the way, what is Elkins to you?

GRACE. Look at me! Have you seen me before?

STOUTER (*gazing at her intently, then starting back*). Well, I'll be hanged! You were at Laramie three years ago!

GRACE. Yes, when Elkins killed that cowboy whom he had robbed. Yes, I was there.

STOUTER. I remember you now! Strange I didn't recognize you at first, but this altitude affects my brain as well as my legs at times.

GRACE. You were seen with Elkins near the Uncle Jared farm in Plum Valley last night. What does that mean?

STOUTER. Elkins wanted me to keep mum about his record out West.

GRACE. Was he to pay you for your silence?

STOUTER (*uneasily*). Well, ever since those big guns in Wall Street broke me in a railway deal—

GRACE (*interrupting*). Come, no nonsense!

STOUTER. He promised to pay me a good wad if I would keep silent until his plan to marry Miss Wilkins had succeeded.

GRACE. And you believed he would keep his promise?

STOUTER. If he didn't, I'd skin him alive.

GRACE. We must foil this man! This girl must not fall into his clutches!

STOUTER. I guess you're right, Miss Stollard. I'm with you even if I lose the wad Elkins promised me. Here's my hand on it!

GRACE (*shaking his hand*). You shall lose nothing for your honesty. (*Loud hubbub of voices off L. U. E.*) There are some picnickers coming this way. They must not see us together.

STOUTER (*looking off L.*). I hope they have brought grub with them, for I'm hungry enough to eat a slab of marble.

GRACE. Follow me, Mr. Stouter. (*Goes to R. 2 E.*)

STOUTER (*going after her to R. 2 E.*). Lead on, Macduff. I follow.

GRACE. There is a hedge yonder where we may talk without being observed. (*Exit R. 2 E.*)

STOUTER (*arranging his clothing, necktie and brushing his hat*). Might as well slick up a bit, if I'm going to enjoy a quiet talk with a nice lady behind a hedge. Oh, I guess I

ain't so bad. (*Calls off R. 2 E.*) Don't be in a rush, Miss Stollard! This high altitude affects my lungs. (*Exit R. 2 E.*)

Enter SALLIE and SCOTT, carrying a clothes basket between them, L. U. E. Then enter after them, LUCINDA, HAZEL and a half dozen boys and girls in outing costumes. A few older persons of both sexes may be introduced in this scene, all being country people. SALLIE and SCOTT carry the basket to L. C. HAZEL goes to bench R. 2 E. and sits playing with a child.

SALLIE (*as she drops her end of basket with a bang*). My heavens! That basket weighs a ton! I thought we never would get here!

LUCINDA (*horrified*). Law sakes! Do you want to break all them eggs, Sallie?

SALLIE (*laughingly*). Wouldn't hurt 'em much, Aunt Lucinda. They're like rocks. I boiled 'em two hours.

SCOTT (*ruefully*). Glad you told me, Sallie, 'cause my stomach's not insured. I ain't an ostrich.

SALLIE. I'm sorry for that, Charlie. If you were, I'd get a plume out of you for my new Easter hat. (*All laugh. SALLIE and SCOTT confer aside L. C.*)

LUCINDA (*busy at basket*). It's nearly lunch time and we might as well have it over with.

HAZEL. Do you need any help, mother?

LUCINDA (*taking victuals out of basket*). Not just yet, Hazel.

Enter JARED with three or four children hanging to him, all shouting, L. U. E. They come C. and other children surround them. LUCINDA, SALLIE and SCOTT are busy with basket L. C. HAZEL sits on bench and watches others, smilingly.

GIRL (*to JARED*). You can't get away any more, Uncle Jared!

JARED. I won't try it ag'in, by gravy! But be keerful so's you don't break my back.

GIRL (*springing upon him*). We won't, will we, children?

OMNES (*together*). No!

JARED. That's a bargain!

GIRL. Let's play circus with Uncle Jared. (*Children shout.*)

JARED. What'll I be? A monkey?

GIRL. No. An elephant.

JARED (*getting down on all-fours*). All right, but my nose ain't long enough fur an elephant, by gravy! (*Children jump on him and he plays with them.*) Don't all jump on my back at once, fur even an elephant's back will break in the middle if you crowd it too much! Keep it up, for I'm the gamest elephant in Plum Valley!

BOY. I'm tired of circus. Let's play ball and make Uncle Jared umpire. (*Children shout, "All right!"*)

JARED (*rising*). Make me umpire? I'm jiggered if you do! My life ain't insured. I don't give you no chance to hit me with one of them bats, by gravy!

LUCINDA (*at L. C.*). Lunch! (*Children run to LUCINDA, who hands each a sandwich or some other edible. JARED talks aside with HAZEL at bench. LUCINDA to children as she serves them.*) Be careful of your dresses, children.

JARED (*aside to HAZEL*). You ain't worrying about last night, be you, Hazel?

HAZEL (*sadly*). How can I help doing so, father?

JARED. What do the Scriptures say, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Come, let's be jolly today.

HAZEL (*with sudden burst of grief*). My heart is breaking!

JARED (*sighs, then turns to children*). Now, run away, boys and girls! You may wade in the creek, but be keerful you don't get your feet wet. Rheumatiz is bad in Plum Valley this summer. (*Children exeunt with shouts and laughter R. U. E.*)

LUCINDA (*to JARED*). We might as well have our lunch, Jared.

JARED (*squatting down L. C. and taking lunch*). I'm hungry as a bear, Lucinda. Jest met Lafe Jones and he gave me lots of news frum down town. (*To HAZEL.*) Come and hear the news, Hazel.

HAZEL (*rising composedly and going to L. C. and sitting down*). I feel better now. What's the news? (*Eats sandwich.*)

JARED. Lafe says old Jim Perkins started to whitewash his barn t'other day, but couldn't finish it 'cause his terbaccer run out. (*All laugh.*)

SALLIE. Jim chews tobacco like a cow does her cud.

JARED. Lafe says Amaranth Perkins wus to have gone to Bridgetown Saturday, but she forgot to put it into the paper and then she wouldn't go.

SALLIE. Poor thing!

JARED. Bert Smith is got another streak of hard luck. He lost six hats on the last election and now he's just got word that the mill he's workin' in is goin' to start up fur the winter.

SCOTT. Bert don't like work any too well. He fell into a well last week and kicked because there wan't no one about to help him out.

JARED. Bill Hermann's son-in-law was operated on fur appendicitis last Saturday, but the operation was not successful, so he will go to work ag'in next week.

LUCINDA. Try this strawberry preserves, Jared. It's fine.

JARED. Don't care if I do. This romping with the children has sharpened my appetite somethin' wonderful.

LUCINDA. It don't need sharpening. It's had a wire edge ever since we married thirty years ago.

SALLIE. Don't give away family secrets, Aunt Lucinda.

JARED. That ain't no family secret. I'm proud of my appetite, fur it outlived them biscuits Lucinda made when we were first married. By ginger! I taste them biscuits yet!

LUCINDA. Law sakes! That's all the thanks I get after working thirty years for you, Jared Wilkins!

JARED. Bless you, old gal, I'm hankering arter them biscuits yet, 'cause they be the finest ever mortal man tasted!

LUCINDA (*mollified*). I never can tell when you're jokin', Jared.

SCOTT (*making wry face*). That joke had whiskers on it!

JARED. Next thing you know, Charlie, you'll ring the gong on me every time I open my mouth.

SALLIE. Charlie's getting practice for that job he's going to get in Boston next year.

SCOTT (*surprised*). What job?

SALLIE. Conductor on a street car. (*All laugh.*)

SCOTT. You're not a bit like sealing wax, Sallie.

SALLIE. How's that?

SCOTT. Sealing wax burns to keep a secret, you burn to give it away.

HAZEL (*laughingly*). That's a good one on you, Sallie. Now will you be good? (*Rises and crosses to bench R. 2 E.*)

SALLIE (*disgustedly*). That joke sticks in my craw.

JARED (*rising*). Time we wus j'ining the folks down in the glen. Run and see if Dr. Markham is coming, Charlie. He ought to be here by this time.

SCOTT. All right, Uncle Jared. (*Exit L. U. E.*)

LUCINDA. We'll have to get these vittles packed up now. Don't be backward at helping, Sallie.

SALLIE (*as she fills basket*). Oh, I just love this sort of thing!

JARED (*at C.*). Lucky fur Dr. Markham I got that bail fixed last night or he would have spent the night in the lockup. The reporter for the Gazette caught onto the arrest, but I called him off, so there won't nothing be printed in the paper.

HAZEL. Thank heaven for that!

JARED. I'm to give Elkins his answer today.

LUCINDA. What answer?

JARED (*aside*). Nearly let the cat out of the bag that time, by ginger! (*To LUCINDA.*) Oh, nothing important, Lucinda. Only a hog trade. Don't amount to nothin'.

LUCINDA. Look out for that fellow, Jared. He'll skin you wusser'n the Squire did if you let him.

JARED. He won't skin me, cuss him! I'll git his hide or bust!

LUCINDA. I'm going to see Mrs. Brown about them calves. I'll be back soon. (*Exit R. U. E.*)

SALLIE (*at L. U. E.*). Here comes Dr. Markham.

Enter MARKHAM L. U. E. Comes down C. quickly.

JARED (*to MARKHAM*). What's doin', Doctor?

MARKHAM (*at C.*). I have good news, indeed!

HAZEL (*fervently*). Oh, I am so glad!

JARED. If you don't tell it soon, I'll jest natcherly bust, by ginger!

MARKHAM (*taking telegram from pocket*). I have been exonerated.

HAZEL (*joyously*). Glorious!

JARED. Do tell! How did it come about?

MARKHAM. After my arrest and release last night, I wired to my father in New York and he sent to the detective bureau for an explanation. It then developed that not only was I innocent, but that the charge against my cousin had been withdrawn only three days ago.

JARED. But how about that advertisement? Why did they put that pesky thing in the paper?

MARKHAM. It was wholly unauthorized and evidently inserted by some person unknown in furtherance of a plot to destroy my good name.

JARED. Geewhillikins! I thought it was them detectives. They do get things mixed up most damnably sometimes!

HAZEL. Why, father, you actually swore that time!

JARED. Did I? Well, this news is wuth a dozen cuss words, even though it do imperil the soul's salvation, as the deacon would say at church.

MARKHAM (*laughingly*). I have no fear of the salvation of your soul, Jared. This telegram removes the only stain that ever rested upon my name and I have abundant reason for rejoicing thereat.

HAZEL. We all rejoice, Arthur.

JARED (*extending his hand to MARKHAM*). So we do, by gravy! You're a man, Doctor, after my own heart! You shouldered your cousin's supposed crime to save him, and, by ginger! the man as would do that sort of thing is worth his weight in gold!

MARKHAM (*abashed*). I'm afraid you magnify the senti-

ment that inspired my course, Uncle Jared. Any man with a soul in him would have done the same, I'm sure.

JARED. I've got my doubts about that! Leastwise, men of that stamp are scarcer than hen's teeth in Plum Valley.

HAZEL. They are scarce indeed!

JARED (*to HAZEL*). Do you love him, gal?

HAZEL (*bashfully*). Why, what a question, father!

JARED. Be gosh! If you and him don't get hitched and trot in double harness, I'll disown you fur life and arter!

MARKHAM. Then you consent, Uncle Jared?

JARED. Consent? I order it, by ginger!

HAZEL (*with mock piety*). I'm a dutiful daughter and must obey my father.

JARED. I'm going to hunt up Lucinda and tell her the hull works, be gosh! (*Starts suddenly.*) By gum! I expect that human hyena, Elkins, here any minute now. If you see him before I do, tell him I've got my answer ready, and if it don't choke him, I'm a sinner!

MARKHAM. I passed him as I drove up the road awhile ago. I fancy he knows more about that advertisement than he cares to admit. In my present frame of mind, I dare not meet him. Let us go to Aunt Lucinda.

HAZEL. Yes, let us go!

JARED. Trot along, both of you! I suspicion I'm going to enjoy this picnic arter all, by gravy! (*Exeunt with HAZEL and MARKHAM R. 2 E.*)

Enter ELKINS L. U. E. He comes down C., looking about cautiously.

ELKINS (*at C.*). Markham escaped the net I cast for him, but I still have a few cards to play—and they shall be winning cards! This rebuff only spurs me on to greater effort, and I am determined to win this woman or die in the attempt. (*Walks about, turns to bench R. 2 E.*)

Enter SCOTT L. U. E. He stands behind bush up L. and watches ELKINS cautiously.

ELKINS (*aside, as he fans himself*). Phew! This is a warm day! Guess I'll shed my coat. (*Takes off coat and*

places it on bench, then turns L.) I must and shall win this battle at any cost! Once I have married Hazel, I'll get possession of her inheritance, and then—poof! (*Snaps finger.*)

SCOTT (*up L., aside*). Now's my chance to get those papers. (*He crosses to R. cautiously and creeps toward bench, watching ELKINS.*)

ELKINS (*at C., aside*). This old fool of a farmer will give me his answer today. Thanks to his fear of the Squire, and my proofs of flaws in the title to his farm, he will do as I command. Hazel will not resist him. I shall insist upon an immediate marriage and then—well, let the future decide!

SCOTT (*aside, as he picks up coat on bench R. 2 E. and takes document from pocket*). I'll make hay while the sun shines. (*Goes to R. 2 E.*) Now, you jail bird, I've got one of your claws! You're lucky if I don't get your coconut! (*Exit R. 2 E.*)

ELKINS (*at L. C.*). Should my plans fail, the diamonds will do to fall back upon. I could raise a snug sum on them and get away with my pockets well lined. They are worth the risk.

Enter GRACE, followed by STOUTER R. U. E. They come down C. STOUTER catches sight of ELKINS and goes up L.

GRACE (*aside*). At last we meet! (*To ELKINS.*) Hugh Elkins!

ELKINS (*turning with a start*). You, Grace!

GRACE (*pleasantly*). Yes, it is I, Grace. You appear to be surprised?

ELKINS (*angrily*). Why do you persist in following me? Where the devil did you spring from now?

GRACE. How unsociable you are, Hugh! And we meet for the first time in three years.

ELKINS. Cut out your satire, Grace. All is over between us.

GRACE. Oh, it is not for love of you that I have traced you from place to place, like a bloodhound. You treated me like a dog, and they say every dog has his day. Well, I shall have mine!

ELKINS (*angrily*). Do you threaten me?

GRACE. You are planning to marry a pure, innocent girl and it is my purpose to frustrate your design.

ELKINS. I warn you not to interfere with my plans.

GRACE (*laughingly*). How virtuously indignant you are! One might easily fancy your cause to be just, you seem so sincere!

ELKINS (*aside, as he turns up R.*). I could kill her! Here comes Jared. He must not see us together—it would ruin everything! (*To GRACE.*) Leave me for a few moments now. We shall come to some arrangement satisfactory to both of us. (*Thrusts her toward L. 2 E.*) Return in five minutes and I promise you you shall have no reason to complain of me.

GRACE (*at L. 2 E.*) In five minutes, Hugh. I shall dictate the terms, you shall comply. (*Exit laughingly L. 2 E.*)

ELKINS (*looking off L. 2 E. after her*). Curse you! (*Turns R.*)

Enter JARED R. U. E. He comes slowly down C.

JARED (*sees ELKINS*). So you're here for your answer, Elkins?

ELKINS (*picking up coat on bench and putting it on*). Yes, I presume you have carefully reflected.

JARED. You bet I have, Elkins! Before I give it, however, let me see the document you say proves the flaws in my title.

ELKINS. I have it here. (*Searches pockets with growing terror.*) The devil!

JARED. The devil hain't got nothin' to do with the title to my farm unless you represent him, Elkins. What I want to see is that document, be gosh!

ELKINS (*despairingly*). I have lost my papers!

JARED. That's rough on you, Elkins, but unless you can produce the document, I can't give you my answer.

ELKINS (*looking about feverishly*). I shall find them, never fear!

JARED (*going to R. 2 E.*). While you be searching, I'll enjoy a dance by the pavilion. Would you like to join in?

ELKINS (*savagely*). No!

JARED (*laughingly*). Don't bite my head off! I'll be back before you find them papers, Elkins. (*Shows documents in his pocket and exits laughingly R. 2 E.*)

ELKINS (*at C.*). What can have become of them? They may have dropped out of my pocket in the road yonder. (*Goes to L. 2 E.*) I must find them, or all is lost! (*Exit L. 2 E.*)

Enter SALLIE and SCOTT R. U. E. They come down C. laughingly, arm in arm.

SALLIE. You ought to get a leather medal for nabbing Elkins' papers, Charlie.

SCOTT. I don't want any medals—I want you, Sallie.

SALLIE. Well, I promise to marry you on one condition.

SCOTT. I don't care if there are a dozen conditions.

SALLIE. You must wait two years.

SCOTT (*disgusted*). Holy smoke! You'd better take me now, for I may change my mind in two years.

SALLIE. So may I. (*Looks L.*) Hello! There's Elkins searching the road down there! Must be looking for them documents.

SCOTT (*laughingly*). A tough job he has on his hands, with them stowed away in Uncle Jared's pockets. Let's watch him.

SALLIE. All right. (*Exeunt with SCOTT L. 2 E.*)

Enter STOUTER L. U. E. He comes down C.

STOUTER (*at C.*). I wonder what has become of Miss Stollard? Hope she isn't affected by the high altitude, too. Since I've bargained with her I haven't the nerve to meet Elkins face to face until I've had a horn or two of good old liquor. This is the dryest picnic I ever attended. Not as much as a soda pop in the whole bunch. (*Looks off L. 2 E.*) There's Elkins with his nose to the ground like a bull terrier. Looks like he's nosing about for rats. Guess I'll watch and see what he is up to. (*Hides in bushes up R.*)

Enter ELKINS L. 2 E. He comes C., looking about.

ELKINS (*aside*). I cannot find the papers! It's plain they have been stolen. But how? (*After a pause.*) I see it all

now! They were taken when I foolishly took off my coat and placed it on that bench there. (*Points to bench.*) But who is the thief? (*Looks off R. 2 E.*) There comes Dr. Markham! Can he have robbed me? Yes, it must have been he! He's coming this way. Now is my opportunity to kill two birds with one stone—to rid myself of Markham and secure my revenge! Yes, I'll take the chance, cost what it may! (*Hides in bushes L.*)

STOUTER (*aside*). Looks like there'll be something doing in the slugging line soon.

Enter MARKHAM R. 2 E. He comes C. and stands looking R.

MARKHAM (*at C.*). This has been a fortunate day, indeed! My name cleared of a shameful stain and Hazel's love forever won! Is there a more fortunate man in all the world than I?

ELKINS (*aside as he crosses cautiously toward MARKHAM, carrying a blackjack*). This is my chance.

MARKHAM (*aside*). When Hazel is my wife I can afford to laugh at this wretch, Elkins—

ELKINS (*interrupting, as he strikes MARKHAM on head with blackjack*). Take that, Dr. Markham!

MARKHAM (*staggers and falls C.*) Oh! (*Apparently dies.*)

ELKINS (*laughingly as he searches MARKHAM's pockets*). It was a splendid blow, and if he survives it I'll be surprised! (*As he searches pockets feverishly.*) My papers are not here! If he robbed me he took care to get rid of them. Well, no matter. I am rid of him forever!

STOUTER (*aside, up L.*). But not of me, Elkins!

ELKINS (*looking about*). I must not be seen here! (*Looks off R. 2 E.*) Here comes Grace. A lucky thought! Why not fasten this crime upon her? It may be done. Women have been known to do this sort of thing before. (*Exit L. 2 E.*)

Children sing in distance off R. STOUTER comes down C. and examines MARKHAM.

STOUTER (*as he examines MARKHAM*). It was a dirty blow, Elkins, but you shall pay dearly for it, I swear! He is

not dead, but his skull has been badly nipped. (*Looks off R.*) The bunch are coming! If they see me here I'll be nabbed for robbery or something worse. If I'm to check-mate Elkins, I've got to keep out of jail. There is Grace. She might suspect me, so I'll make tracks out of here. (*Exit L. U. E.*)

Enter GRACE *R. 2 E.* She stands at entrance and looks off.

GRACE (*as she looks off R.*). How happy they are! I, too, might have been happy but for that man! (*Turns C., sighingly.*) When I see him suffer as I have suffered, my vengeance will be complete! (*Sees MARKHAM lying C., starts in surprise.*) What is this? Blood! It is murder! Help! Help!

Enter JARED, followed by HAZEL, LUCINDA and children *R. U. E.* Then enter SALLIE and SCOTT *L. U. E.* They come down *L.*

JARED (*coming C.*). What has happened?

HAZEL (*running to MARKHAM and kneeling beside him*). Arthur! Murdered!

Enter ELKINS *L. 2 E.* He stands *L. C.*, simulating surprise.

ALL (*in a voice*). Murdered!

HAZEL (*in agony*). Who has done this cowardly deed?

ELKINS (*pointing to GRACE*). That woman!

HAZEL (*to GRACE*). You!

GRACE (*horrified*). It is a lie!

JARED (*at R. C.*). Why should this woman kill Dr. Markham?

ELKINS. Because he spurned her love!

GRACE. Monster!

JARED (*to ELKINS*). How do you know, Elkins? Have you ever seen this woman before?

ELKINS (*uneasily*). Only with Dr. Markham.

JARED. That don't prove black is white. (*To GRACE.*) Do you know Hugh Elkins?

GRACE (*tearfully*). Yes.

JARED. What is he to you?

GRACE. My husband!

HAZEL (*caressing MARKHAM*). Poor Arthur!

JARED (*to ELKINS*). So this woman is your wife, Elkins! I promised you my answer today. Well, it's this—go plumb to Jericho, or I'll hang you, by gravy! (JARED *stands R. C., pointing to ELKINS, who stands L. C., smiling cynically at him. MARKHAM lies C. with HAZEL bending over him, and as curtain descends he lifts his head. LUCINDA stands up R., SALLIE and SCOTT up L. Children are grouped across stage in back. As curtain falls STOUTER walks across to C. in back and stands shaking his fist at ELKINS, until—*)

CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

SCENE: *Same as Act I, one month later. Stage well illuminated, it being afternoon.*

At rise discovered LUCINDA on veranda.

LUCINDA (*calling*). Sallie!

SALLIE (*offstage L. U. E.*). I'm coming!

LUCINDA (*impatiently*). What on earth are you doing down the road so long?

Enter SALLIE L. U. E. She comes C.

SALLIE (*displaying a letter*). Just went down to meet the letter carrier, who gave me this letter for Hazel.

LUCINDA (*coming C.*). Who can be writing to Hazel?

SALLIE (*giving letter to LUCINDA*). Here it is, Aunt Lucinda.

LUCINDA (*taking letter and examining it*). From South America! Maybe it has to do with Uncle Billy's death.

Enter HAZEL from house R. She comes C.

SALLIE. I guess you're right, Aunt Lucinda. (*To HAZEL.*) A letter from South America for you, Hazel.

HAZEL (*surprised*). For me? From whom, I wonder? (*Taking letter from LUCINDA.*) From Montevideo!

LUCINDA. Read it, Hazel.

SALLIE (*getting close beside HAZEL*). Sure! I'm dying to know what it's all about.

HAZEL (*opening letter and reading*). "Miss Hazel Wilkins, Plum Valley, New Hampshire—We beg to notify you that not having received a reply to our former communication sent you four months ago, informing you that you are the sole beneficiary under the will of the late William Wilkins, your lamented uncle, you are likely to forfeit your interests unless you communicate with us before January 1 next. Your inheritance approximates \$60,000, and unless you care to relinquish your rights as sole devisee, you will attend to this matter without delay. Yours respectfully, Chalmers & Walker, Counsellors at Law."

LUCINDA (*surprised*). Law sakes! Sixty thousand dollars and all for you!

SALLIE. It must be a pipe dream!

HAZEL. This is strange! There must have been another letter. I did not receive it. What became of it?

SALLIE. Ask Elkins.

HAZEL (*surprised*). Elkins!

SALLIE. That was the letter I saw the carrier put in the box the morning I saw Elkins loafing about the place. He stole it! It's a cinch!

HAZEL (*after pause*). I see it all now! He learned of my inheritance and it was to secure it that he resolved to marry me!

LUCINDA. That must be it! Strange we never thought of it before.

HAZEL (*folding letter*). Well it is over now. I shall reply to this at once. Did you hear the result of the trial of Miss Stollard for attacking Dr. Markham?

SALLIE. Charlie came up from Berkeley an hour ago. He says she will be acquitted. (*Looks off L. U. E.*) Hello! Here's Dr. Markham.

Enter MARKHAM L. U. E. He comes C. hurriedly.

HAZEL (*to MARKHAM*). What news, Arthur?

MARKHAM. Miss Stollard was acquitted, just as we expected she would be.

HAZEL (*joyously*). I am so glad!

MARKHAM. The jury did not leave the court room. Her innocence was established by Elkins himself, although he did his utmost to send her to prison. He swore he saw her strike me, but Mr. Stouter was equally positive he saw Elkins knock me down with a blackjack.

HAZEL. Must this man escape the punishment he so richly deserves?

MARKHAM. I shall not prosecute him, Hazel. Stouter is now in consultation with Ted Simpkins, and I fancy a warrant for his arrest likely will be issued before Elkins is enabled to quit town.

SALLIE. I hope they stretch his neck!

LUCINDA (*horrified*). What an unchristianlike sentiment!

SALLIE. Oh, rats! (*Sound of wagon wheels heard off L. She goes to L. U. E.*) Here comes Uncle Jared.

JARED (*offstage L. U. E.*). Whoa!

SALLIE (*calls off to JARED*). Don't let that thoroughbred get away with you, Uncle Jared.

Enter JARED L. U. E. He comes C.

JARED (*to others*). None of you haint seen Elkins hereabouts, hev you?

HAZEL (*surprised*). Why, no. Why do you ask that?

JARED. He skipped out of town when he heard Ted Simpkins was out gunnin' for him.

MARKHAM. Was the warrant for his arrest issued?

JARED. It was, be gosh! Stouter swore to it and Ted went to Bowles' Hotel arter Elkins, but he had skipped out. If he comes to Plum Valley I'll fill his hide so full of holes it won't hold shucks, by ginger!

HAZEL. I hope we may never see him again. What became of Grace Stollard, father?

JARED. Do you know, I'm dinged sorry for that woman? Arter the trial I went to her and I says, says I, kinder soft like—

LUCINDA (*bristling up*). Jared!

JARED (*starts*). Course I didn't speak soft like, only plain talk. I said to her, says I—

SALLIE. If he don't say it soon, I'll bust!

JARED. I says to her, "You done Dr. Markham and Hazel a durned big service in exposin' Elkins, and if you're in need of a hum, I'll fix it with Lucinda so's you can stay with us in Plum Valley until moss grows on your pretty shoes; by gravy!"

HAZEL (*clapping her hands*). That was a gallant proposal, father. Of course, she accepted it?

JARED. She said she would come to the farm and talk it over with Lucinda. (*To LUCINDA.*) It's all right, I s'pose?

LUCINDA. On general principles I ain't in favor of having strange female women in my house, especially when Jared does the inviting, but in this case I welcome the poor woman with all my heart. When will she come?

Enter GRACE L. U. E. She comes C.

JARED (*joyously*). I knew you'd be true blue, by ginger! (*Turns to GRACE.*) Here she be now.

LUCINDA (*extending hand to GRACE*). Welcome to Plum Valley, Miss Stollard. Take off your things and make yourself at home.

JARED (*to GRACE*). It's yours as long as you stay, be gosh!

GRACE (*tremulously*). I thank you, sincerely, good friends, for this great courtesy.

LUCINDA. Don't mention it, Miss Stollard.

GRACE. Call me by my real name—Mrs. Elkins, hateful though it be. I owe you more than I can ever repay, and I trust you may never find me ungrateful.

JARED. We owe you a heap for saving Hazel from this critter you call husband. Tell us all about him.

GRACE. It is not a happy story, my friends. We were married in Nebraska ten years ago. He was a confidential bookkeeper then and doing well. For some months he treated me with kindness and I fairly worshipped him. (*Shows emotion.*)

HAZEL (*putting arm about GRACE.*). Poor woman!

GRACE. My husband got to gambling, and one day the awful truth was revealed—he was a defaulter to the amount of \$10,000. He was discharged by his employer, who refused to prosecute, and we went to Wyoming. Here, in the wildness of the cattle camps, my husband's nature underwent a complete change. He became a common gambler and both of us eked out a miserable existence for many unhappy months.

JARED. Gambling is a mighty poor way of making a living, by gum!

GRACE. One night, in a card game, my husband killed a cowboy and became a fugitive. He deserted me, a fact I did not then regret, for he had treated me shamefully. My love turned to hate and I followed him from place to place in search of revenge. For three years I traced him from city to city, but was unable to meet him face to face until I reached this place. I gained access to his room in the hotel at Berkeley one night and found a letter addressed to you, Miss Wilkins, notifying you of your inheritance in South America. It is here. (*Produces letter and gives it to HAZEL.*)

HAZEL (*taking letter*). Thank you.

GRACE. I then learned that he designed to force you into a marriage with him in order to secure this inheritance, and I sent an anonymous note to Dr. Markham, who, I was told, was known to be one of your best friends. Meanwhile I met Mr. Stouter, whom I had known in the West, and was arranging with him to expose my husband's perfidy when the brutal attack upon Dr. Markham and my arrest upset all my plans. (*Sighs.*) It is all over now and you are safe from him, let us hope, forever!

HAZEL. Be comforted, Mrs. Elkins. It is not likely that he will be seen in Plum Valley again.

JARED. What's this letter about an inheritance?

HAZEL. Why, to be sure! I had forgotten to tell you that Uncle Billy has left me his entire fortune of \$60,000.

JARED (*surprised*). You don't say! Well, Billy had a big heart, even if he wa'n't no bigger'n a peanut. He wus so little that when he had a pain, he didn't know if it was his corn or head that was achin'. So he left all he had to you? God bless him! Your future now is safe!

LUCINDA (*going to veranda*). Well, we'll have supper now. Come along, everybody.

JARED. I'm so hungry, I could eat a slice out of the barn door, by gravy! I hope you have pumpkin pie, Lucinda.

LUCINDA (*at door of house*). Three of them, Jared. (*Exit into house R.*)

JARED (*going to house*). Then I'm off to the banquet, by gum!

MARKHAM (*to JARED*). Be careful you don't get dyspepsia, Uncle Jared.

JARED (*at door of house R.*). Dyspepsia be gol dinged! With a doctor in the family, who cares for dyspepsia. (*Exit into house.*)

SALLIE (*going to house*). Me for them pies and dyspepsia, too, for all I care. (*Exit into house.*)

GRACE. I had better leave you now, Miss Wilkins.

HAZEL. You will find mother in the sitting room, Mrs. Elkins. I shall rejoin you presently.

GRACE. Thank you. (*Exit into house R.*)

MARKHAM (*to HAZEL*). Before we discuss your mother's pumpkin pie, may I ask if your being an heiress will influence your relations to me as your affianced husband?

HAZEL. How absurd! Were I worth a million and you penniless, I should still deem myself fortunate in having won your love!

MARKHAM. I thank you for those words, Hazel! Love's highway, they say, is strewn with obstacles for those who truly love. If that be true, much happiness is in store for us both.

HAZEL. I am so happy, Arthur! Even during those awful weeks when your life hung in the balance, I felt that our love would not be vain.

MARKHAM (*embracing her*). I owe my life to you and your devotion as my nurse. You saved my life and I now devote it to you! May I never prove unworthy of your trust and faith in me!

Enter SCOTT L. U. E. *He comes down C. and on seeing others halts suddenly and watches them.*

HAZEL (*embracing* MARKHAM). You will be true to me as I ever shall be to you, my Arthur! (*They kiss.*)

SCOTT (*hiding his eyes with hands*). Ahem! Don't mind me—I ain't looking! (MARKHAM and HAZEL *separate in confusion.*)

MARKHAM (*laughingly to* SCOTT). You rascal! You're always happening in at inopportune moments!

SCOTT. That's what my father said when I was born.

HAZEL (*laughingly*). There's no answering Charlie! (*Going to house.*) I'm off to supper.

MARKHAM (*following* HAZEL). So am I. (*Exeunt with HAZEL into house R.*)

SCOTT (*looking about*). I saw a man in the underbrush as I came up the road just now. I wonder who it could be? (*Looks off L. U. E.*) Hello! There's Ted Simpkins! What does he want?

Enter SIMPKINS L. U. E. *He comes C.*

SCOTT (*to* SIMPKINS). Hello, Ted! Look like you was in a hurry. Lost something?

SIMPKINS. Naw. I'm lookin' fur Elkins. Have you seen him?

SCOTT. Can't say I did, Ted. I saw something much like a man in the underbrush down by Plum Creek awhile ago. A tramp, most likely.

SIMPKINS. Mought be so, but it mought also be Elkins. Guess I'll have a look. Keep your peepers open and let me know what you have seed when I gets back. (*Exit* L. U. E.)

(*Lights dimmed; evening effect.*)

SCOTT (*at C.*). It's getting dark. I'd hate to meet Elkins about now and me with a gun in my fist. I wouldn't do nothing to him! Guess I'll have a bite of pumpkin pie. (*Exit into house R.*)

Enter ELKINS L. 2 E. He is untidy and unkempt and he stands at entrance nervously watching.

ELKINS (*at L. 2 E.*). I was not mistaken! Simpkins has trailed me here and I have little time to loose. (*Turns to house, from whence sounds of laughter come.*) They are at supper, and if I am to get those diamonds, I must act quickly. Once they are in my hands I'll be off for Europe and Monte Carlo. I've made a mess of affairs, but all is not yet lost! They shall not capture me! I'll die first! (*Creeps upon veranda and approaches door with caution.*) I'll have those jewels or know the reason why! (*Exit into house.*)

Enter SIMPKINS, looking at ground as he walks L. 2 E.

SIMPKINS (*coming C.*). He must be hereabouts, for sure thing, here be his tracks. I know them by the heel plates in his boots. I wonder what his game is now? (*Draws revolver and goes to house.*) You never almost always can tell what these jail birds of the Elkins breed will do when they're cornered. (*Noise heard offstage in house.*) What the deuce is that noise? Durn me, it's somebody runnin' for a getaway! (*Looks off, then retreats C.*) It's Elkins, by hek!

Enter ELKINS from house, hastily. He runs to C., where SIMPKINS confronts him with drawn revolver.

SIMPKINS (*pointing revolver at ELKINS*). Hands up, Elkins!

ELKINS (*surprised*). The devil!

SIMPKINS. You'll jine him durned quick if you don't hold up them fists of yourn!

ELKINS (*holding up hands*). Don't shoot, Ted. What do you want?

SIMPKINS. It's you I want and you I'm goin' to keep now that I've got you, Elkins.

Enter SCOTT from house. He comes C.

SCOTT (*sees ELKINS*). Elkins! (*To SIMPKINS.*) Need any help, Ted?

SIMPKINS. If it ain't too much trouble, you might cover Elkins with this gun while I search him for swag.

SCOTT (*taking revolver and pointing it carelessly at ELKINS*). Shall I pink him, Ted?

SIMPKINS. Keep your finger off'n that trigger until I git through. (*Searches ELKINS.*) Letters, eh? Here's some addressed to other people. Been robbing the mail, Elkins? Serious matter, that, runnin' foul of Uncle Sam. Hello! What's this? (*Takes jewel case from ELKINS' pocket.*) A jewel case! Jammed with diamonds.

SCOTT. They belong to Hazel. The skunk was robbing her! Gee! I think this gun is going off by itself.

ELKINS (*alarmed*). Be careful, there!

Enter HAZEL, JARED, MARKHAM, LUCINDA and GRACE from house. HAZEL and JARED, followed by MARKHAM, come C., LUCINDA and GRACE remaining on veranda.

HAZEL (*alarmed*). My diamonds have been stolen!

SIMPKINS (*giving her the jewel case*). Here they be, Miss Hazel. Just took them from this highwayman.

HAZEL (*starts*). Mr. Elkins!

ALL (*in a voice*). Elkins!

JARED (*squaring up before ELKINS*). I got a notion to lick you good, by gravy! What do you mean by robbing my daughter?

Enter STOUTER L. U. E. He comes down C. slowly.

ELKINS (*laughingly*). It was a joke, Uncle Jared.

JARED. Them jokes are costly, Elkins. I s'pose you thought it a joke when you hit Dr. Markham with a black-jack?

ELKINS (*defiantly*). I didn't hit him!

STOUTER (*to ELKINS*). You lie! I saw you do it!

ELKINS (*starts*). Bah! No one will believe a drunken scoundrel such as you!

JARED. I believe him, by gravy!

STOUTER. Sure, they must. I'm on the water wagon now.

JARED. D'ye mean you've got a job drivin' the water cart down to Berkeley?

STOUTER. No, I've quit drinking. I've braced up. I'm going to work in the Berkeley bank tomorrow.

ELKINS. Who'll watch the funds?

STOUTER. It won't be a gent named Hugh Elkins. He'll be too busy working in the chain gang.

SIMPKINS (*handcuffing ELKINS*). Guess we'd better get back to town, Elkins. Give me that gun, Charlie.

SCOTT (*ruefully, as he gives revolver to SIMPKINS*). Sorry it didn't go off accidentally.

JARED. Take him away, Ted. The sight of him spiles my supper!

ELKINS (*defiantly*). Curse you all!

JARED (*strikes fighting attitude*). Don't you cuss me! Take him away before I spile his face!

SIMPKINS (*leading ELKINS to L. U. E.*). I'll put him away in a safe place.

STOUTER (*to ELKINS*). Ta, ta, Elkins. (*Exeunt ELKINS and SIMPKINS L. U. E.*)

MARKHAM (*to STOUTER*). I thank you, Mr. Stouter, for your services in my behalf.

STOUTER. Don't mention it, Doc.

MARKHAM. I trust you may always find a firm seat upon the water wagon.

STOUTER. I will, unless the high altitude affects my head, or the blamed thing breaks down.

HAZEL. Have no fear, Mr. Stouter. Be firm and have faith.

STOUTER. I'll win, if I can stand the high altitude. Guess I'll go down town and help Simpkins stow Elkins away. (*Exit L. U. E.*)

JARED (*sitting L. at table*). Gol ding it! This has been a great day! (*Takes document from pocket.*) Well, I'll be durned!

HAZEL (*surprised*). What is it, father?

JARED (*displaying document*). I forgot to tell you that the lawyer told me the title to the farm was sound as a nut and that this document of Elkins' isn't worth the paper it is written upon.

MARKHAM. Excellent! How about Squire Watson now?

JARED. He be gol dinged! (*Rising.*) Where's Charlie?
SCOTT (*at R. C.*). Here.

Enter SALLIE from house. She goes to SCOTT R. C.

JARED (*to SCOTT*). You want to git all slicked up, 'cause we're going to have a regular party here tonight, by ginger!

SCOTT (*taking SALLIE's hand*). I'm willing, 'cause Sallie and me is going to celebrate.

JARED (*surprised*). Celebrate what?

SCOTT. Our engagement.

ALL (*surprised, in a voice*). Engagement!

SCOTT. Sure. Sallie and me is going to be married. Ain't we, Sallie?

SALLIE (*bashfully*). Betcher life! (*Confers with SCOTT aside*).

JARED (*sighingly*). By gum! These kids rush things faster'n we uster do when we was courting, eh, Lucinda?

LUCINDA. Law sakes! The world has got swifter and courtin' slower in thirty years, Jared.

JARED. I don't know but what the world is better for it, by hek!

MARKHAM (*taking HAZEL's hand L. C.*). We are sure of it, you and I, Hazel.

HAZEL (*shyly*). Quite sure, Arthur.

MARKHAM (*to JARED*). Since the world has become more rapid, we have decided to go with it at the same pace, and with your permission—(*pauses*)

JARED. Don't be bashful, Arthur—out with it!

MARKHAM. Hazel and I will be married within two weeks and then we're off to South America on our honeymoon tour.

SALLIE (*to MARKHAM*). Count us in on the bridal tower.

JARED (*standing C., with arms uplifted as if pronouncing a benediction*). God bless you all! When you get back, we'll give you the greatest reception ever heard of in Plum Valley! (*HAZEL and MARKHAM stand in close embrace L. C. SCOTT and SALLIE hug each other R. C. JARED stands C., looking at others alternately with happy expression. LUCINDA and GRACE stands on veranda watching others, until—*)

CURTAIN.

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